

The ball had finally begun to wind down, a wave of tired, drunk and elated people started swarming out of the castle, tavern songs being pulled and echoed along their path. Brom sat against a pillar, arms hanging loose at his side, numb at this point.

Tyrian had been staring at a picture for a while now, the empress stood against a black sun wrapped in bloodsilk, and from the darkness, the Consorts blue eyes followed you as you walked the room.

"What a shame I didn't get to see him, he sounds the type of male that could make the matriarchs tremble" an unwanted smirk sneaked up on her, dragging her mind back to the quickly emptying room.

"We should get going, can you shadow us in front of the crowd again spawn?"

Brom forced himself up, back grating against the sculpted stone" id rather talia didnt, i ate good food here, i want to digest it"

Nym and Talia had been hovering over the dessert table, stuffing everything that was left into a variety of pockets neither grom nor tyrian knew they had. They heard the suggestion and perked up at the same time, turning almost 180 degrees in a second, the perfect picture of an owl and its hatchling, followed by frowns that tried their best to convey genuine anger

"Arlqe you two frafy? We're in THE cust!! Nym's grunts came muffled by about 3 cupcakes, now fighting for first rights to slide down her throat.

"I hate to agree" Talia's tone convinced a total of zero people " Buuut... The consorts room is here" she couldn't help but blush at the idea, "Their war room would probably make Alona's office seem like a summary"

That was enough for Tyrian's eyebrows to perk.

"Hooked" the devil girl smirked, "aaand there might even be some stuff about who's being considered for the academy reward" Brom, however, showed no signs of being swayed, so she changed strategies .

She puppy eyed him so hard her tail started wagging.

"Pleaaase?"

It was a clear 3v1 at this point, so he sighed, and joined Talia's circle, her shadows swallowing them, the lobster in Brom's stomach protested.

They plopped out in a dark, badly lit room. The shadows spitting them like a particularly stubborn furball. The air was old enough to retire, bookshelves taller than a Hill giant stretched to the ceiling on both their sides, not even a moths flapping dared break the silence.

"Where did you bring us Talia?" Brom's hand squeezed his temples hard enough to dent them.

"Uhhh, left? I'm not that precise yet"

"Looks like the library, and it's even bigger than the academies!". Tyrian eyes darted from section to section like a cat following a fly "Fundamentals of blood magic.. catalogue of deep layer summoned beasts, body molding, soul scrubbing.. none of this stuff is allowed at the school, this is incredible!"

The proud grin she flashed talia turned to a frown immediately as she spotted the green dot making its way up the shelves

"Goblin no!" Tyrian hissed, flashes of her slaves messing up her study, of her moms whip searing her back, had her teeth wresting each other hard enough to make her gums bleed

"Im just getting a better view kikiki, you know the consort, and dying in a book labyrinth would be the worst"

Nym balanced atop the thin boards, claws dug deep into the wood.

"I see someone! Or it could be a really big prune.." her last word was cut short when the wood bellow her started.. sweating? A Viscous, slippery syrup like liquid made her knees shake, and feet slip, the barely a meter tall goblin tumbled down, banging from shelf to shelf like a slinky down a staircase, luckily, brom caught her before the floorboards greeted her skull.

"Kikiki thanks Brom, the places really slippery"

Time around them seemed to stop, needles pricked Talia's spine like a blind acupuncturist. A voice, tired and exasperated rose from around them.

"Is it not enough you gremlins come and make out against my tomes, now you're climbing me? I get no respect anymore"

Their eyes darted around, but no one was in sight.

"What? Not even an apology? A library's feelings don't count? Classic"

They all recognized that tone, and recoiled. No matter the race, a disappointed parents voice always made a teens skin crawl.

Nym was the first to break silence.

"Are you... the books?"

The voice scoffed, faking offense like a mother whose sink kept getting filled as she washed.

"Im Amelia thank you very much! Hmph"

The voice softened, the books around them fluttered their pages, tossing years old dust into the air, the golden and silver specks swirled and hugged each other, until becoming a single, floating mouth above the four of them.

"But I guess that's one way to put it, though they're just part of me, so use the wipes on the table before browsing them with your grubby hands!"

Tyrian's eyes shone brighter than the queen's servants against the darkness. "They infused a spirit into the room! A fabricated haunting! t!The necromancy threads to pull this off make the largest webs back home look like messy yarnballs!"

The shelves trembled in joy, and Amelia's voice hinted at a rare sense of contentment

"At least one of you recognizes my greatness" "Tell me Drow noble, what do you look for here? And why should I not warn the guards of a group of non vampires trespassing?"

Tyrian had so much to ask it was hard to choose just one, but before she could voice any, Talia cut in.

"Do you know where the consort is Amelia? Why wasn't he at the ball?"

"Dont take my question spawn!" Tyrian looked like someone desperately trying to catch their favorite mug as it kept slipping down.

"Oh he's dreamy isn't he?" Amelia chuckled" "so gentle with the pages, never spilt a single tea drop"

"So, do you know?" Talias hopes slowly fanning into an open flame, Brom an Nym's ears had perked long ago.

"I know what he set out looking for, here"

The books shook, then they saw it, flapping its pages a tome rose from a distant shelf, golden dust coating the ground below, and settled slowly at their feet.

Talia knelt, patted the dust off the silver embroidered dark cover, and read it out loud.

"The Beginning and the Inevitable End: A Treatise on The Creator Dragons"

Brom tried swallowing his dread, but ended up choking on it. Tyrian cherise cats grin was pure delight, Talias mind straight up refused to compute, and Nym had no idea what any of it meant.

Amelia's chuckles were a curse in candy wrapping.

"Still set on going after him little gremlins?"

The cogs in Talia's head clicked in place at the Rhythm of a ridge wasps wings. "Gods is that were Luna went?"

Amelia laughed out loud "I told you exactly because you couldn't interrupt" "now, scurry off before i have the skeletons drag you"

Tyrian's jaw finally settled out of a smile, and it hurt. "Unused muscles, who'd have guessed these needed practice too"

Talias hadn't, but that didn't stop her probing.

"Wait, the consorts at the creator caves? Why? If they wake up the world ends!"

"What do i know of his intentions demon kin? And its beyond any of us to question them"
Amelia's patience was quickly running thin. Talia had deflated twofold when Brom spoke up, each word thought out carefully, , and coming out at half the pace.

"Look... Amelia, I apologize for the intrusion, but I have to ask..how does one become capable of entering here appropriately?"

Amelia's chuckle could melt a glacier into a flood. "Ask directly, subterfuge does not suit your kind "

Grom sighed, saying it out loud made it too.. real, but he had to.

"How do I.. become one of them?"

"Finally! Was that so hard?" The dust in the air coalesced into a cackling mouth, hovering above them.

"The queen must deem you worthy, of course, but i must say half orc, you are.. unimpressive"

Grom shoulders slumped

"I know... but.."

Nyms screech cut through cleaner than her claws ever could

"No he's not! You have no idea what you're talking about, Brom could cleave a boulder in half!" Her growls of a cornered fox in front of its pups filled the halls

"You are much more interesting than he is goblin child, it's a rare thing your kind can even feel magic, and you..." Amelia was having way too much fun to not prod, even if Azrael would cut her soul for it.

"Let me ask you something? What does it feel like when the demon spawn shadows you away?"

Nym stopped for a second, then answered like she'd just been asked what color the sky is.

"Like all magic, duh! It always tastes of something, hers tastes smoky"

The books flapped their pages in a wave, the closest amelia got to shivering

Brom, talias and tyrians jaws gaped in unison

"Taste? What in the hell are you talking about?"

Amelia couldn't be having more fun.

"Oh that's delightful!"

"So you're saying Nyms like.. a prodigy?" Talia did her best to not sound too shocked, but the disbelief was so dense it fell to the floor with a "Thud"

"The ghost clearly lost its mind, shoddy necromancer work afterall" Tyrian, after recovering from the initial shock, glanced between Nym and the mouth made of dust, who now seemed more like a bad fever dream.

"Kikiki i knew it, grandpa paw always said so" Nyms cocky, sharp grin melted Brom's heart.

"Let her have it guys, besides, we've seen weirder stuff" Brom turned to Amelia's golden, fluttering grin.

"I understand my shortcomings, but i cant give up, i'll do anything".

Talia whispered in Tyrian's ear

"Do you know what he means?"

Tyrian's reply held a bitter dose of incredulity.

"Are you daft you walking tripwire? "One of them, what do you think that means?"

Talia's heart sank deep enough to touch the lost continent. Amelia's chuckles were an eerie contrast to the requests consequences.

"Tell you what little warrior. I'll give you a test." Amelia's tone jumped straight into the "horrible idea" step. "Azrael is great, most times. But he has a... critter that eats my pages! And he lets it! Because it's cute? Yes just like the moths that lay eggs on me"

Her voice raised, the shelves shook and dust teeth grinded in the air.

"So.. if you get rid of it, I'll give you a book on what you want."

"What kind of animal is it?" Brom pupils had widened into dark marbles

"A tiny, slithering, disgusting thing" if a ghost could wretch, Amelia would.

"Tiny? I don't know if i feel good cleaving something so outmatched.."

Talia's shock came through as a cracking screech. "CLEAVE?! Brom, we can just get it out of here, poor little thing.."

"Is It edible book lady?" Nym licked her grinning teeth, pulling at some hair stuck in her 8th canine.

"I'd guess anything is for you" Amelia was increasingly regretting the offer. "I don't care how you do it, just get it out of here"

"Where is it? How do we get there from here?" Tyrian had come to a certainty, she was stuck with 3 idiots until this got done, she better make sure it was right.

"Hmm... it's probably in his quarters, 4th floor above, the stairs at the end..."

"No need" Talia interrupted, she grabbed Tyrian's wrist, then hugged Nym and Brom, and called their ride.

"Oh gods no" Brom wrestled his way out, but his head was already spinning.

"Im going to rip your heart out and put it in a jar". Tyrians voice was as soft as a maces swing.

"Weeeee" -Nym

Surprisingly, they plopped out at the right place, even if the floor was at the ceiling.

They plummeted onto the creaky wooden floors, expecting to lose breath on impact, but it was... soft. Under them, a black and starry slimy substance pooled and cushioned their fall, it stretched towards the end of the room, where a small, trembling ball of ooze made from the same stuff stared up at them with line like eyes.

"Did it.. save us?" Brom instinctively tried to wipe the goo off, but it didn't cling to him.

"Is that the book eater? This will be easier than i thought" Tyrians fingers were already crackling blue

"No! Look at the poor thing, its scared"
talias heart leaped at those colours "its like the consorts raven"

"Its the cutest thing ever!" Nym had already gotten up, and was rushing to hug it