

"Hit," Lev muttered as another arrow sunk into the hay bale he'd been training with. 'What's wrong with me?' He thought, trying his best to ignore the autumnal wind, stifling a shiver. Nock another arrow, pull back, not too hard, focus, and... "Hit. That makes eighty. Prodigy?"

"Right, as you command, young master." The pompous spirit answered sarcastically, separating from Lev in a billowing plume of smoke before taking its humanoid form. "So, boy," It asked as it reached into his bag for a thermos. "What's the matter? Your thoughts and spirit energy haven't been stable in days."

"I have no idea what you're referring to," Lev lied as he sat on the cold ground, he knew what it was. That girl wouldn't leave his mind. "It's that Ink girl isn't it? I can smell her spirit all over you every time you pick up that bow." The spirit floated over, smirking mischievously, its four eyes fixed squarely on the young archer. "You can't fool me, I am you. Either you're upset because she had to heal you again, or you're in love."

"I am NOT in love!" Lev shouted, his face flushed with embarrassment as he slammed his hand onto the cold ground. "How could you even suggest such a thing?" He grabbed a handful of dirt, how could someone like him be in love? 'I've hurt too many people. My soul is tainted.' he thought as he let the soft earth fall through his fingers. "It doesn't matter. Maybe that's what'll make you stronger."

"What are you babbling about now, prodigy?" Lev stared at the ground. 'If you have something to protect, you'll fight even harder!' Mars' words echoed in his head as he stood up. "Something to protect, is that it?" Feeling the smooth wood of his bow in his hand, his eyes locked onto the hay bale once again. "I'm not worthy to say those words to her yet. But these words here, I can say," He readied himself once more, his lavender purple eyes shining with determination. Nock an arrow for her, see your target for her, "Become better, not just for yourself, not just for Rococo, become the best you can be because you have no other choice."

"I'll say it, Rococo Artifex. You've enthralled me, even in this short time we've known each other." He fired, his first arrow sailing straight through the hay and piercing a far-off tree. "You've helped me realize I've been fighting wrong all this time, how selfish can I be?" Another arrow, this time it embedded into the remains of the hay, exploding in a blinding violet light. "So I say these words from the depth of my heart. I, Lev Jupiter, swear on my honor, I will protect you!"

"Those are certainly some big words from you, Archer." That voice, that sly, honey-coated voice. Lev froze, she heard him, But how much? Maybe he could play it off, she couldn't have heard too much, and he hadn't even sensed her. "What's the matter? Feeling sick or something?" She laughed as she circled to make eye contact. "Look at me Archer... Lev." He flinched hearing her say his name. "If you really intend to protect me as you claim, you'll have to become far, far stronger than you are now." She smiled, she knew that would be enough. "Do your best, my knight in shining armor."

"A knight? I suppose that would be fitting."