

Chapter Six: Ambassador Klaus Klossner

Klaus took a casual look around the Throne Room; he'd been pondering the tasks assigned to him by the Royal Court while slowly becoming accustomed to this new way of life.

If he was honest, the situation he found himself in was actually fairly enticing. He stood in a new world with fictional creatures flourishing all around him. Not just that, but the developing social dynamics coming to life before his eyes fascinated him.

He'd finished earning his graduate degree only a few months prior and was in the process of gaining work-based experience with the CPS's global studies and international relations program, and that had landed him here.

The prospect of never returning home again to see his family was something he had to accept, and he suspected the Empress' powers helped a tad with that, but that didn't mean he felt nothing for the loss of his previous life.

A small smile touched his lips as he watched Violet's pleasantly passive expression while fashioning the Empire's maid outfits; the scene reminded him of his grandmother, when she was still alive, rocking in her chair while knitting different products that she'd give her grandchildren on special occasions.

However, this beautiful young woman sitting in front of a massive blood-colored throne was anything but an elderly lady. He couldn't sense it; in fact, her very presence was only noticeable from his vision. The spider-like creature was no different than her mother as far as he was concerned, a ghost unless she wanted to be seen.

Klaus' blue irises fell to a lovely young woman in her late teens, wearing an intricate maid's outfit while she danced before the thrones. Violet watched her, seemingly able to multitask without much issue as her delicate fingers moved like water, forming her silk into the last clothing piece for the maids' first set of clothes.

Valerie Meyer...

He watched the woman perform an elegant dance, unable to place which country the style came from, but if he were to take a wild guess, he'd make a bet it was Russian.

Violet had first crafted each woman matching white undergarments before weaving each maid very closely matching outfits with slight variations that appeared to be based on Violet's own personal taste for each individual.

Valerie's bright blonde hair fell to her lower back and was loosely bound by a honey-hued ribbon that bunched the ends of her thick hair into a sort of painting-brush design. Her bangs were kept out of her face by a white pleated headdress with black ribbons used to tie under the back of her head, underneath the silky locks falling down her back.

She wore a knee-length long-sleeve black dress with pleated edges that had an orange circle designed just above the black layer. White cuffs at her wrist kept her sleeves in place, a high neck was folded over to hide the honey-hued woman's neck-tie with white lines above the hem hung between her breasts, and somehow, the same colored ribbons were tied just above her thin biceps, leaving the fabric smooth.

A plain but elegant white apron petticoat overlapped the dress, tied down by a thin orange ribbon tied into a tight bow around her waist.

Other details included black maid's shoes with a double bow, white silken gloves, and milky tights with lace detail.

In all, it was a very attractive outfit on the girl, and to say everything was form-fitting would have been an understatement. Women would have killed to have the measurement

accuracy Violet was able to perform with her clothes, and since they were fine silk, they were made to be breathable and give a little slack under pressure.

Klaus' hummed softly while watching Valerie happily practice her dancing skills while Violet and he watched; a relaxing violin seemed to be produced from thin air, and instead of the dancer following the music, the music played to each twist of Valerie's hips, the rise of her legs, and motion of her hands.

I've indeed found Wonderland ... to think I'd see a girl willingly ... happily take on the role of a maid.

It had been two hours since he'd been revived, and everything had been moving in slow motion for him as he soaked up every detail around him.

Violet had even completed a suit for him that he suspected would have cost him in the thousands; not only was it visually appealing, but the spider princess had told him that it would be extremely difficult to damage.

Twisting his body to the side, he studied how he looked in the high-quality material.

From rags to riches.

His vision shifted away from the gentle melody to see the two butlers in the distance, moving through the colossal entry hall to take on their assigned roles, but that wasn't what had caught his attention; Lucky was casually walking his way.

The young man stopped a few feet away, following the dancing maid with his chestnut irises.

Klaus opened up a communications link with him at the man's request, likely unwilling to interrupt the woman's concentration with idle chat.

"She certainly is lovely, isn't she?"

A curious smile touched Klaus' lips as he studied Lucky. *Couldn't you say the same for every woman that's been brought back by the Empress' power?*

"Hehe ... ya got me there. Still, I find Gwen has all the features I particularly enjoy, and she's got a bit of a bite, I can tell. I'm thankful to have the chance to work with her."

Bringing up Gwen off the spot? That's the woman that's acting as the intermediary to the living, correct?

"She's the one."

I see. How's the conversation been? I suspect you've been chatting with her this entire time?

"Mmh ... more or less. To be honest, I wanted to find out more details about everything that's transpired, and thought it would be good to get acquainted with all the other humans and Ri'bot ... speaking about Ri'bot, crazy, huh? Toad people ... not the way I thought I'd go out."

Klaus' chest shook with his fellow soldier of the Empire. *No, it wasn't even in the realm of possibilities.*

His chestnut eyes shifted to him, and the man put his hands on his hips. *"You been figurin' out what you're supposed to do next? All the humans are getting restless with what happens in a year or two."*

Can we even say what will be happening in the next two hours?

"Haha! Yeah, you got a point, but I gotta keep them calm and collected somehow."

His eyebrow rose. *What kind of answer could you give?*

"Meh," Lucky shrugged, *"the standard; we'll be surviving and expanding the Empire. The religious part I've been learning about from Gwen is an interesting touch, though,"* he mused.

Yes, I've gotten quite a rundown of it.

Lucky's teeth flashed, eyes sparkling. *"Rundown of it, huh ... how's the rundown of our Head Maid?"*

Knowing where the man was heading, Klaus just returned the smile. *As one might expect from a woman in her position.*

"Oh, c'mon, dude," Lucky teased. *"The first thing you did when you came back was to assess the situation and move in on that pretty black-haired slice of cake! Don't deny it; somethin' about her caught your eye."*

Was I denying it? Klaus replied, lips falling into a small smirk.

"Eh ... ah, okay, I see you, Mr. Politician! That one statement has multiple meanings behind it, huh? What..."

He paused as Klaus held out his hand apologetically. *Excuse me, but I should really be preparing for my task. I'll be joining the Clavex Clan party into the Nalvean territory.*

"Ooh ... okay, okay," Lucky chuckled, taking his grip. *"Seems like you're the lucky one, getting to get out and explore, but hey,"* he pressed his tongue against his lower lip while glancing back at the hall, *"I can't complain about the view here!"*

The two men broke off, and Klaus moved back toward the entry hall; he caught Adonica standing by the massive doors, and he couldn't help but feel sorry for the girl. He wasn't sure why she'd been the only maid to be placed on standby, but judging by the actions that happened afterward, she wasn't having a good first day in the Empire.

Her younger brother had been pestering her with a myriad of questions since he felt much more comfortable speaking to her than all the strangers around him, and though she tried her best to hide the fact, the internal stress had left Adonica tense.

Still, she waited dutifully, and her brother calmed down over the past hour, leaning against the door to talk with her about their lives.

Klaus continued into the hall, littered with the dead, as Gwen took on the task to document each corpse with their loved one's wishes, and eventually, he made it to the stairs leading to the lower levels.

Walking down the long smooth edges of the vast hallways, designed for the small Yalmáth, was a simple task, and gave no impression he was entering a dark or gloomy dungeon. In fact, the glowing gems above made the walls and floor gleam.

He exited on the first basement floor, boasting twelve-meter ceilings. The decorations were mainly artwork of unfamiliar scenes, depicting Quen'Talrat victories, but there was evidence that couches, pedestals, and plants had once lined the broad, fifteen-meter hallways.

The first open room on the right was his destination, the kitchen. Klaus hadn't been to the area but had been granted the information from Valdar upon questioning the Ri'bot about key topics concerning his assigned tasks.

An impressed expression dawned on his face as he took in the grand space, designed for giants.

Three-meter tall black granite counters, cabinets, and islands contrasted the white stone floor, walls, and ceiling. It was surprisingly clean and free from clutter with odd appliances housing gems inside neatly placed around the space.

Atop one of the counters lining the left wall was the cook, Antonietta Briseno, with three helpers. She was studying a long, thin sheet of metal atop the counter, but her focus moved to him as he entered.

Upon seeing the woman's outfit, he nodded with an appraising eye; Klaus had seen Violet weave the pieces but seeing her with it on was another experience entirely. The woman truly looked like some of the head chefs he'd seen on cooking shows such as *Hell's Kitchen*.

Antonietta easily hopped down the three-meter drop, landing smoothly on her feet to join him. Her pretty voice had more volume than Klaus expected. "Keep draining the blood. We'll let it hang for another hour."

They softly mumbled their replies.

"Louder."

"Yes, Mom!"

She met Klaus with a neutral expression; blood was splashed across her three helpers, but she was without blemish. "Is there something more you'll need, Ambassador?"

Klaus shook his head, giving her a warm smile. "No, no, I was just curious about the whole process ... do you know how any of these devices work?"

She turned back to stare at several items. "In a general sense, yes. Edmon has given me a rudimentary knowledge of how to activate the stones, but the process of how they function eludes us. I've managed to figure out how to alternate the temperature the metal becomes through trial and error, and with Tiffany's help, we have a decent amount of sanitation means to process everything with reasonable safety."

"Reasonable," Klaus mused. "I suppose we don't know much about anything in this new world."

"Hmm ... we are making leaps and bounds where we can," Antonietta commented. "By the time you return, there should be a healthy supply of jerky, and you recall the details on edible food inside the jungle ... not that you require food."

"No ... but it is certainly a treat," he chuckled. "Jerky, huh? Will there be flavoring?"

She nodded, pointing up at a few large bowls. "I'm experimenting with several marinating sauces, and we still have many ingredients to extract and mix."

"I can't wait." His eyes moved to the woman and two young men helping her. "Your family?"

"Yes. They decided that helping me cook would be the best way to spend time with me, and the Empress seemed thrilled with the idea. My eldest son, Manolo, and his wife, Ramona ... the last is my middle-child, Enrique."

"Ah," Klaus waved his hand as they shot him nervous glances, "I didn't mean to take away from your time with them. Hmm ... I was just curious about what the kitchen looked like before heading south."

"Away from the Capital?" Antonietta asked.

"Yes, I'll be seeing the Nalvean Capital."

"Huh ... if you get the time, I'd love to hear about the adventure."

Klaus was a little surprised by the woman's soft smile. "Sure, and you can treat me to some jerky when I return. Sound like a deal?" He asked while flashing his teeth.

"I look forward to it." Waving her hand, she returned to her family, jumping to the counter instead of taking the wooden ramp.

A soft hum rumbled in Klaus' throat, eyes creasing slightly while moving from Antonietta to her kids.

Judging by how they look ... if she had her first kid in her late teens or early twenties, which is likely for Colombia, then she'd be ... somewhere between her late forties and early fifties. It's so hard to tell with everyone brought back returning to their prime.

Chuckling to himself, he turned around and left, ascending the stairs to reach the east-wing second floor. Nadraca was there with Camellia and a few of her people, but two new additions caught his eye. Valdar had told him about their acquisition.

So ... it's almost time to go.

Standing a little off to the side was Xaria Welix of the Delthax Clan and Xaria Iona of the Flex Clan. It must have been recent since they'd arrived because the rest of the Clavix Clan were giving them nervous glances.

Klaus stopped beside Nadraca, vision shifting to the large bundles of materials tied to the back of two Thélméthra drones.

Well ... isn't that convenient.

"It seems we're heading out soon?" He asked.

The group turned to face him, and Camellia responded first, practically bouncing on her feet; her human form was much more lively and energetic than Violet's stoic continence.

"We're so close; I can't wait to get going!"

"Soon..." Nadraca mumbled, rubbing her left shoulder while eyeing the girl. "We were just going over the final check."

The process didn't take that long, and just as he expected, their party consisted of ten individuals, Nadraca, Klaus, Violet, Ukara, her understudy, Frinel, Camellia, the two Xaria, and the Thélméthra drones.

Their exit of the Capital was without incident, but the five Ri'bot were more than a little skittish with hundreds of massive Jukal eyes following them.

The birds watched, but Klaus suspected the Thélméthra Princess had some part in the creatures not willing to attack. Their leave only appeared to be of slight interest because they didn't follow.

Klaus was enjoying his new-found physical aptitude. He found it a little bit ironic that he was within the *Unholy Rights Unit* as a part of the *Inquisitor Class*, having the *Truthseeker Sub-Class*.

The thing was, he'd never been particularly religious, but the truth had always drawn him in, which was part of the reason he'd entered politics, to begin with. At first, he believed he could jump into the world and uncover the blanket of darkness surrounding it, but as time went on, he became a bit more cynical about the whole game. He still wanted the truth, and the means some of his mentors used to get it blurred the lines more than once.

His new powers put a smile on Klaus' face; his senses had been enhanced, and he obtained specific abilities to detect lies, among many other things. Torture had been something he was moderately against while alive; after all, torture could be defined numerous ways, but it generally boiled down to the point of distress to coerce an answer, and that included blackmail.

Torturing someone by putting their moral compass in-between a rock and a hard place was the standard practice of politics, and veiled threats to instill fear or a show of force were sometimes necessary for negotiations. There were only three possible paths one could select when one was an ambassador, concede all rights, continue to compromise, or raise the sword, and it was the representative's job to know what ground could be given and when it was time to end discussions, threatening the blade with your silent exit of the room.

Many of his moral qualms had been called into question over the years, but now, as an Undead, he found many of those questions becoming somewhat irrelevant with his current state of mind.

He was no longer human, and he was not dealing with humans. His job was to negotiate or discover the best possible path that would allow the Empire to flourish, and if that hurts another nation, then that was an acceptable price.

The only thing that truly mattered was the Empire—Earth, his former life, every dream that he'd strived for, it was all gone; the only thing left was the Empire, and Elinor was its core.

Klaus casually moved through the dense foliage, brushing back massive leaves and wading through thick undergrowth. The group didn't make much idle conversation, but a few interesting points kept him occupied.

Both Xaria mumbled lowly to one another, and it soon became obvious that there was a struggling relationship trying to bloom between the two.

Welix's deep voice spoke softly while taking up the rear of the group, Iona ahead of him. "How's the Flex doing, traveling to the Black Fortress with all the Jukal flying around?"

"Tongue lickers," Iona softly growled. "Did the High Priest tell you why there are literally thousands of the Wixum..."

She caught herself, and Klaus amusedly assumed it had been a common curse among her clan before the Empress had united the clans.

Iona spat out a sigh. "... literally thousands of the tooth-brained things are gathering in the valley?"

"No ... he said that it isn't of our concern."

"Supreme Chief Edmon sent Quen'Talrat protectors to guide them back, though?"

"Ah, so he did it for the Flex, too..." Welix mumbled.

"Yeah ... umm ... why do you think the Empress decided to have us do this ... together ... like, you and I? There are plenty of Xaria in the Wixum and Delthax, right?"

"Actually, I heard Wixum doesn't have a single Xaria..."

"Seriously?" Iona hissed, licking her teeth. "I can't believe we were so scared of them, but, umm ... you didn't answer my question," she nervously mumbled.

"Why us? Well ... I can't say."

Iona fell silent for a moment, and Klaus' light smile lifted a bit.

How far is she going to go with this direction?

Loud booms could be heard around them as Camellia repeatedly slammed into trees, all but guaranteeing nothing would attack them with how destructive she was being.

He didn't have a grasp on the spider princess's personality, but her current giddy and wild attacks against nature made it clear he didn't want to get on her wrong side; from the moment he first laid eyes on the fire-headed spider-girl, he wanted no contest with her.

Camellia released a reckless fury of destructive energy without a hint of concealing it like the other members of the Empire's combative force, and judging by how Violet and Camellia's relationship stood with the few interactions he saw within those two hours after his revival, Violet was far stronger.

If Camellia was a stick of TNT, Violet was a trained war tactician with top-secret pinpoint weaponry at her disposal, and within the Nexus, he knew that Violet was the most influential member of the Empire underneath the Royal Court.

Iona finally cleared her throat, drawing Klaus' attention from the sharp snapping of thick branches left by Camellia to hear the Ri'bot almost whisper, "The Empress understands our hearts ... right?"

Welix's brow furrowed as he leaned in closer. "What was that? That last boom was too loud..."

“I asked if the Empress can...”

An explosive burst of air and noise passed over them as Camellia pulverized a branch the size of a Torlim, sending splinters flying around the area as she laughed, continuing to devastate the helpless trees.

“Nevermind!” Iona pouted, folding her arms as her blue irises darted to the continual racket assaulting their ears. “What’s she even doing?”

“Who can say ... scaring away all the Jukal?” Welix offered with a shrug.

Iona’s teeth pressed against her lips with dissatisfaction. “No ... you can feel that, right? There’s no way anything in the jungle would attack something that releases those kinds of vibes ... no wonder everyone feared the Thélméthra...”

The conversation continued, but Klaus' attention turned in as he pondered his position within the Empire.

I'm not a combative unit ... no, even though I'm Heroic-Grade, I know I can't even begin to dream of fighting near her same level, but that's not my fight.

He studied the Ri’bot’s behaviors and the difference between the Clavex and valley cultures. The Clavex seemed much less closed-minded and strict on their beliefs than the valley Ri’bot, but they also had a very similar reverence toward their Mother Superior as the clans did with their Chiefs.

There was a critical difference between the attitude of both, though.

The Chiefs were the strict hand of law that governed how the valley clans found order and stability while that didn’t seem entirely necessary to the Clavex.

The latter lived in a very stable, peaceful, and powerful society; the Nalveans provided much of the structure Chief leadership brought, leaving the Mother Superior to offer more personal and emotional support, which is why Nadraca went against her leader’s wishes.

To the Priestess, the Mother Superior was a wise leader, but Nadraca had a moral obligation to follow her heart and morals on the topic of reclaiming something many of her clan had since lost, a semblance of self-government and personal freedom.

Even if the Clavex were not slaves, they were essentially indentured servants paying off a debt, which came with a tax on goods. It was a relatively reasonable contract by Earth’s standards, but to Nadraca, who knew nothing else, saw it as oppressive, and she wanted to rid her clan of this burden.

On the other hand, Iona and Welix wouldn’t dare dream of doing such a thing against their Chief. To them, what Nadraca had done was a slap in her leader’s face, and they wouldn’t be surprised if she were thrown out of the clan for sedition at a minimum.

He listened and learned as they traveled; it took a few hours to trek to the Clavex’s beached boat, and to everyone’s shock, it was still there. Although, the water level had fallen drastically, requiring Camellia to bring it back into the river after patching up the damage.

Klaus wasn’t an expert in ship composition, but the vehicle was well designed from his limited knowledge, given the technology these creatures seemed to possess. It appeared to have a strong singular mast with battens to reinforce it, rudders for steering, although that looked to be a new feature, and there were waterproof compartments.

After loading everything on, they set off, taking the Thélméthra if they needed the extra bodies to transport goods; they were covered up with tarps to hide the fearsome creatures from anyone that might take notice.

Two Jukal landed on the mast, watching the group as they continued downriver. The trip was rather enjoyable to Klaus as he studied the jungle from the seacraft.

Rolling hills and mountains could be seen, rising up from the earth to form into colossal titans, blocking their view of the sky, and more than once he caught sight of strange creatures along the shore or in the river, which was over two miles across at some points.

One of the more fascinating things that caught his eye was when they were passing through two large cliff faces, exiting the valley. High above, he could see the ruined remains of a tower that resembled the structures in the Capital.

Upon further question, Nadraca explained that it was one of the remnants left behind by the Quen'Talrat, a stronghold that had fallen during the wars more than a century ago.

The whole experience excited him as they exited the valley, entering Ri'bot territory that Welix and Iona didn't know. Nadraca didn't have much information on them either, as only the clans immediately surrounding the Nalvean territory's edges made trades with them.

There were signs of purple-skinned toads and more bizarre wildlife, but the biggest surprise came when they passed into the Nalvean's land, and the technology swiftly advanced.

It was as if they'd entered a mix between Chinese and Egyptian-styled architecture, and the tools they employed to load and empty docks were similar, with some sections of the land showing large cranes made out of thick black wood. Every inch of the pier to the cranes, buildings, and ships showed signs of artistic design.

Klaus couldn't help but bombard Nadraca with questions as the seawayers gently moved through each town, leading them toward the city near the Great Ruby Lakes.

"What are all the carvings and designs for?"

"Mmh ... oh, that's for religious purposes. They all tell stories ... many repeat, but it's customary for them to do that to anything they can."

"Of past events?"

"It can be like that, yeah ... although, it's more about their dreams and what they believe their deities show them. Wait ... does the Supreme Chiefs give them dreams?"

"Fascinating ... so, their whole civilization has carvings of their dreams. Is that their language?"

Nadraca seemed a little flustered that he skipped past her question but kept answering his inquiries as Camellia listened in her spider-form underneath a tarp with the other drones. "It's one of their written languages ... they have two. One is the dream language ... it's actually much easier to understand than their common-tongue."

"Do you speak their common tongue?"

"No ... they actually learned our language since it's really hard for us to speak theirs."

"Hmm ... they look rather ... menacing compared to everything else I've seen in this world. Even the Thélméthra don't have the physical intimidation they seem to have ... although, I will say Camellia herself is far more frightening by sheer power."

Nalveans were like massive spiked salamanders with thick, jagged scales and monstrous faces, but it appeared that the females were more smooth with less sharp daggers jutting out of their powerful figures.

Even though the females had slimmer figures, smaller hands, and a more narrow face, their tails were thicker and stronger. Nadraca said the female warriors were feared by other races when they put on their battle armor that utilized each of their features.

One of the most frightening things about the Nalveans was their ability to manipulate the wind and water with crimson energy that radiated from their bodies; some Ri'bot believed they obtained this power from the Great Ruby Lakes, but it was only a whispered speculation.

The more Klaus heard, the more he grew content about his death.

This is what real adventure is ... trading a life of mediocrity for something like this ... more than worth the price.

His eyes moved to Ukara as she motioned up ahead. “We should be able to see the Capital’s Grand Palace, soon ... it’ll still be a bit before we get there, though.”

Klaus took a deep breath, keeping his gaze fixed in the direction the young Ri’bot pointed, holding his breath.

A whole new culture to learn ... if they can speak Ri’bot common-tongue, then there shouldn’t be a problem, but Tiffany was right ... what we really need is to steal a corpse to bring back. Negotiations will take on a whole new level of authenticity if we speak their mother-tongue.