Case 2 Moses

I bowed before the queen, “Your majesty, what are your orders?”

Queen Selina who had been quietly reading a book on her throne before I entered slowly looked up at me with her emerald eyes and examined my scarred face beneath the hood.

“Ah, assassin, I was not expecting you to come here until this afternoon, does this mean that the Earl of Wern has been slain?”

“It does, your majesty,” I replied as I remembered the Earl’s screams for me to stop and winced.

“Was it an easy kill?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I lied, it had been anything but easy but I had to make his punishment last, I needed to in order to keep myself sane. For if I killed too quickly then I would have been back in front of the queen all too soon, back in front of the monster that made me kill. Back before the woman that made me a Worldstain.

Before I was killing for Royalty, I was killing for fun, for honour. I was only a boy, I did not know the meaning of the word empathy nor did I want to. And Selina knew that, so she stopped me from killing unnecessarily and made me kill “necessarily” meaning that I killed for her and her alone. I couldn’t even kill for myself anymore.

Now I knew what empathy was, the people I killed had done me no wrong, so why should I kill them, why should I make their blood run all over the marble floors of their mansions? Of their shacks?

If I didn’t do her bidding, I would be next.

So, there I waited in her throne room for what I hoped was the last time and waited for her orders.

“Who must be eliminated now, Queen Selina?” I asked, hiding my voices malice.

The queen looked at her nails and said my next target’s name, “Fastus Rellin.”

I was not familiar with the name and I knew the names of every rich person in the country.

“Is he an Earl, majesty?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“He is a blacksmith,” Selina replied looking up from her nails.

“I see, and why must he die?”

“He wronged me, once upon a time.”

“As you wish, majesty,” I bowed. There was no point in asking her what “wronging her” meant, I would need to kill him whether I knew why or not.

I was about to leave when the queen gave one last order.

“Tell him he should have chosen more wisely, he will know what it means. He lives in a small town by the Scale Ruins, you’ll know it when you see it.”

I nodded my head and made my way out of her palace and towards the Scale Ruins.

I rode South for several days only stopping to feed my horse and stop at an inn.

The latter I tried to do as little as possible, I had a reputation in Kyrsuna and it was not a good one.

I had been killing for the queen for many years and as a result, the people of the Kingdom both rich and poor knew me as the Black Death and recognised me almost instantly.

One time, I had stayed in too many inns and someone my victim knew had told him of his fate, so he ran to the Isles with his family, the Queen had beaten me senseless after that. I could not afford another punishment.

Then it was a beating but if I failed this time it would have been my head.

After five days, I finally arrived at the Scale Ruins, the remnants of the old royal family, the old royal castle which was now nothing but a few burnt stone bricks.

I pressed my hands to the stone. *How much better off we all would have been if Kratan hadn’t won.*

I looked to the East and sure enough, I saw a small settlement of stone houses with straw roofs.

There wasn’t a mansion or palace in sight. I continued to wonder why the queen wanted Rellin dead.

I walked through the settlement and observed the people’s terrified stares as I walked towards them and their sighs of relief once I ignored them. *The Black Death was not coming for them today.*

I got off my horse and walked towards a small old man, I bent down to his level. He shied away from my gaze and covered his face. *Look on the Black Death and yee shall die in 7 days.* That was one of the rumours about me.

“Where is Fastus Rellin?” I asked.

The man still cowered behind his hands as he pointed towards a small workshop at the end of the street.

“Thank you,” I whispered as I glided silently towards the blacksmith’s workshop.

I stood in front of the shop and observed the man I was sent to kill.

Fastus Rellin was not the big brute that I had imagined, I thought that he would be eight feet tall and five hundred pounds but the man that was standing before me hammering at steel was average in every sense of the word. Save for his face which was sculped by the angels themselves.

He had a herculean nose, and eyes that shone the brightest green. His long black hair was tied in a ponytail, it whipped on his back with every slam of his hammer. His cut jaw bathed itself in the light of the outside with every whip.

“Are you Fastus Rellin?” I called, breaking myself out of my trance.

“I am, how can I-

He paused when he saw me and smiled delicately.

“Oh, it is you. I was wondering when the Queen would come around to me.”

I paused, *he had been expecting me? For quite some time by the way he talks.*

Despite this revelation, I passed on the queen’s message.

“The Queen says-

“I should have chosen more wisely?” The blacksmith smiled.

“Honestly, that Selina, so predictable. Well, you can tell her that choosing my wife over her was the wisest decision of my life!”

“Choosing your wife over… her?” I stammered.

Then it clicked, the reason why I was there. All at once rage boiled within me, this man was not a threat to anything but Selina’s pride, he shouldn’t have been a target!

I had always known my queen was petty but I never in a million years would have guessed that she was THIS petty.

“Bitch,” I cursed under my breath.

“What was that?” Rellin asked without a hint of malice or concern.

“Nothing,” I whispered.

*I still have to kill him or I will die, this man that has done nothing wrong still needs to be punished, he still needs the Black Death.*

“Regardless of reason, I must kill you,” I stated, arms shaking.

“Then, get it over with,” Rellin sighed as he placed his hammer down and turned to face me.

“No, I would like to talk for a while, if it is all the same to you?” I begged.

If I killed him then, I would have had a long ride back to the castle just to leave again on my next brutal assignment.

“Very well, I have nowhere to be,” Fastus joked as he pulled out two chairs from the back of his workshop and placed them in front of me.

I was about to sit down when he gave a command of his own.

“Remove the hood.”

“Are you not afraid of catching the Black Death?” I asked.

Fastus smiled and shook his head. “If I am to die today anyway, what does it matter?”

*Can’t argue with that logic.* I thought as I pulled down my hood and showed him my scarred face, he was the first person to see it clearly outside the Royal Castle since I was dubbed the Black Death.

Fasus’ eyes widened as he examined my face. “My god, you are just a boy!”

I nodded my head absently, I would turn seventeen that winter.

“How could she do this?” Fastus asked with tears in his eyes.

“I have been asking myself that very question for four years,” I sighed.

Then, we sat there, in silence for an eternity, the only sound to be heard was the sniffling of the handsome blacksmith.

I wished to cry with him but I could not, not anymore. I had exhausted all of my tears in the first year when I was a scared little boy being forced into stealth and assassination classes.

At least then, I did not know my victims had faces, had names, and had families.

I did not think they could cry either.

I wondered what would happen to Fastus’ wife after today, I wondered if he had any kids.

But in the end, I put these thoughts aside, drew my blade, and silently slipped it into the handsome blacksmith’s neck, and waited for the tears to stop.

But they never did, even after his eyes watered their last drop.

I fell to the ground and sobbed.

I looked at the handsome blacksmith’s fresh but slowly decaying corpse and unable to speak mouthed “I’m sorry.”

*Rellin was no threat, not to the queen, not to me, not to anybody.*

But still, I left the knife in his throat and exited the workshop for his wife to find his corpse.

I drew my hood back up and started to slowly make my way back North to the Queen, to the devil.

Before I left the town, I looked back at the shop let out a single tear, and rode back to Rellin’s workshop.

*A man like that deserves a proper burial.*