



Vi Kors

The Mist and the Lightning

Part 9

СОДЕРЖИТ
НЕЦЕНЗУРНУЮ
БРАНЬ

18+

Ви Корс

The Mist and the Lightning. Part 9

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The next series of the acclaimed series of books. Nikto, without a change in face, sat at the table with an indifferent look; suddenly he got up and, turning away from them, went to the stairs to the second floor. Содержит нецензурную брань.

Chapter one

A dream

Yellow autumn leaves circled and fell from the trees. Arel recognized this place – exactly there Nikto brought him long ago. There, for the first time, Prince Arel knelt down, asked Nikto to make him his slave and accepted slavery of his own free will. And he agreed to the brand. He agreed to wear a black tattoo on his face forever and received a dog collar on his neck as a gift. This time there was neither Amba nor her dog. It was this time autumn there, and the trees were all adorned with golden foliage.

Arel suddenly realized that he was wearing a woman's dress, white with a pile of fluffy satin skirts and a tight corset laced up in the back so it was hard to breathe. At the same time, his chest remained open, the corset began a little lower. On the rings inserted into his nipples, large teardrop-shaped pearls now additionally hung, and strings of mother-of-pearls were beautifully stretched through the rings, encircling his chest and hanging down in semicircles onto the corset.

Arel wore a woman's dress a couple of times in his life as a joke or for a loss at cards, so he knew these sensations, but he never tightened the corset so much that it was difficult to breathe. He was sitting on the ground covered with fallen leaves, dazed, breathing convulsively, pearl drops quivering on his chest. Nikto stood before him.

"Hug me," Arel asked. Nikto sank to the ground, pulled him to himself and gently touched his lips to his. Arel reached out to him, kissing him back and taking his lower lip towards him, stroking his tongue and touching the rings that were threaded through it. Nikto closed his eyes, thickly painted black; his eyelids twitched.

"I'm your bride," Arel whispered, barely audible.

No one threw him to the ground, continuing to hug him with one hand, and with the other lifting up the fluffy skirts of the white wedding dress. Yellow leaves rustled beneath them, surrounding them with the tart scent of ripe autumn.

"Just don't leave me! Just don't leave me anymore! Nik, I beg you!"

Nikto turned him over, burying his face in the fallen leaves. Arel's shoulders trembled from the jolts, and the rigid corset didn't allow breathing. He didn't see that Lis was standing very close to them, near the orange tree.

He only noticed him when Nikto let him go, but maybe Nikto noticed Lis before?

"Fox, don't be jealous, I fell in love with Nik," says Arel somehow lifeless. "Sorry," the last word sounds guilty.

But contrary to his expectation that Lis would understand, his face twisted into a grin.

"I'm jealous?! Advice and love!"

Nikto doesn't move, but Lis falls as if from a blow. His red hair mingles with red foliage. He lies without moving or getting up.

"Don't do that," Arel pleadingly asks Nikto. "Let him say what he wants. I'm not offended at all. Don't punish him."

Nobody pulls out his box of "medicine" from the bag. It is not a syringe that he pulls out of it, in his hands there is not a glass rod and steel, but a beautiful and thick gold ring. It is smooth and shiny. Engagement?

"Well, come to me," Nikto calls, and Arel gets up, comes up, not taking his eyes off the golden ring. But contrary to his expectations, Nikto doesn't take his hand, he is not going to put the wedding ring on his finger as his bride, but stretches out his hands, raising them higher and unclenching the ring, and tries to insert it into Arel's nose, right into the nostrils. Arel recoils in confusion, not wanting

to have a dubious adornment, and then Nikto pushes him, throws him to the ground, leaning on his back again with his whole body, and, opening it, inserts a gold ring into his nose, pushing it into his nostrils. Arel feels how the decoration painfully tears the septum in his nose, feels how it widens his nostrils, interferes with breathing, feels heaviness.

Lis slowly rises from the ground, several fallen leaves tangled in his wavy hair. He looks at Arel, who now has a gold jewelry sticking out of his nose, with some horror, and Arel feels a burning shame.

“Nik, don’t,” Arel tries to say, but his tongue twists, as if it’s swelling in his mouth, and all he gets is a kind of moaning through force.

“Don’t...”

“Prince Arel! Arel! Wake up!” Lis shakes him by the shoulders. Dear Lis, so dear and homely, sleeping in bed nearby.

“What are you humming there? More nightmares? It’s the same every night!”

Arel looks at Lis with eyes still dull from sleep, not understanding:

“Lis,” he finally says, and his gaze clears up, “Nikto will return in autumn.”

“You’re delusional,” he chuckles and at the same time asks, “but what, the man you sent to the Royal Route for news has not returned yet?”

“No,” Arel shakes his head, “he hasn’t returned, but I think he will return soon. And Nik, Nik will be back soon too!”

He jumps out of bed:

“I dreamed that I was in a white wedding dress...”

“Oh no! Not that! I’m not going to listen to your nonsense!”

A tattered piece of “Upper Messenger” lies on the table in front of Lis: “The Son of the Devil, nicknamed Nikto, made a daring escape from the Royal Prison, using the Black Sorcery... je opened a mysterious portal leading straight to the Underworld... hidden in the depths of the ancient catacombs, where no man has gone...”

Lis looked up at Valentine, who was standing next to him.

“Has the owner already seen this?”

Valentine nodded in dismay:

“Yes, he told me to show it to you as soon as you return from the hunt.”

“I see. What else did he say?”

“He ordered to bring wine,” Valentine trembled. “And this ... this Son of the Devil, will he come here? Sir?”

“I don’t know!” Lis got up. “It’s not your concern!”

“Yes, of course, I’m sorry,” Valentine, bowing, scared back to the door.

Lis entered the prince’s room without knocking and saw the already pretty drunk Arel.

“Are you drinking?” He winced with disgust.

“I celebrate the victory!” Arel raised his glass. “Join!”

“Hmm, a victory?”

“Don’t play the fool, Lis, you understand everything perfectly! My Nik made them all and escaped from prison, right from under the noses of these pouty sirs! And they thought they were so smart! He’ll be here soon, you’ll see! He will return! Soon!”

“Do you believe in this nonsense?” Lis threw the “Messenger” sheet on the table. “The Son of the Devil bewitched Karina, daughter of the head of the Royal Security Service, when she brought him medicine and food. This is complete nonsense!”

“No-no,” Arel happily shook his head, “this is not nonsense! I was there, Balthazar asked her to go down to Nikto’s cell and make an injection, since he himself didn’t want to climb the stairs!”

Lis looked at him incredulously:

“Why didn't you tell me this before?”

“I didn't attach any importance to this then, and to be honest, I felt bad, Lis, since Kors crushed me a lot.”

“And he bewitched her?”

“Well, it was probably invented for beauty, of course, that Nikto bewitched her. But obviously they somehow got there in the cell and came up with an escape plan, although, who knows, maybe he bewitched her, I don't know, it doesn't matter! Drink with me, Lis! Drink!”

“Maybe you have had enough?”

“No! I will drink, I am happy! My Nik is coming soon!”

“Where did the portal take him to? Maybe he's in his Unclean Limit. Two months have passed!”

“He will come. He will come to me. He promised!”

“And what about Karina?”

“What Karina? I shit on this bitch! Who cares?!”

“Well, then you asked me: “How will he take revenge on Kors? How will he take revenge on Kors?” You see, he took revenge. He ran away, making a fool of him, and grabbed his beloved daughter!”

“Yes! He's cool, right?!” Arel laughed.

“And you whined, you were afraid that nothing would come of it.”

“I believed. I believed, and...”

“What?”

“We need to prepare for his meeting! We need to meet him properly!” Arel opened a drawer and took out a box of dyes, smiled a drunken smile, looking at Lis.

“What are you up to?” In the voice of Lis there was tension.

“I don't have a bell strip here, otherwise I would put it on you again.”

Lis said nothing, but a look of doom appeared on his face.

“I have here a lot of muzzles for slaves,” Arel threw a muzzle mask consisting of thin straps at Lis.

“Do you want to put it on me?” Lis asked somewhat defiantly.

“I wanted to. You're a slave of Nikto, and I thought that such a meeting he would like. Twenty years ago, all the slaves here wore such. They are slightly different so that you can immediately identify a slave from a plantation or a slave from a barnyard. This is the muzzle of the slave who served in the house.”

“And, that is, it should be an honor for me? Well, Arel, give me the muzzle of the slave of the cesspool cleaner! I'll put it on!”

Arel laughed:

“Lis, I wanted to do it, but I changed my mind.”

“It's strange. I can't even imagine why?”

“They all have a leather flap in place of their mouths. When the slave ate, he could lift it a little, and still he always walked with his mouth shut so that his rotten teeth were not visible and so as not to offend the sirs with the stench.”

“And? What confused you?”

“I like to see your mouth, your lips. How you twist them, even now, in an attempt to seem indifferent. This is so funny! You make me laugh, Lis. And I remembered, remembered something that will hook you much more than a banal slave muzzle.”

“You...” Lis looked at the box in his hand.

“Who are you, Lis?”

And Lis lowered his head:

“I'm a jester, I'm a fool,” he said quietly. And the drunken Arel laughed.

Chapter two

Black Bey

“The old man said everything right,” said Mike Rout, “as he said, there they went out.”

“Well, like this!” Edin Ol, sitting next to Black Bey, grinned, content.

“There are not many exits from the Great Quagmire. Everyone knows that!”

“And from there to the Royal Route in the most remote place,” Mike continued.

“So we'll meet them at the abandoned cemetery,” Bey said.

“Yes,” Mike nodded, pouring local muddy liquor into a rough earthen mug on the table. He drank it all down in one gulp and winced, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

“We grazed them all day, they are heading in this direction, as the old one said.”

Bey grimaced as if he had also taken a sip of the moonshine of the marsh, although he didn't take a sip:

“Don't remind me of him once again, this vile old man pisses me off!”

He looked around the squalid little room of the low hut in which they were. The scarce furnishings of the dwellings of the bog dwellers didn't favor a cozy pastime. Bey slanted down, looking at the dirt floor and the rotten straw heaped in the corner.

“There's something there! I swear in the name of Gods! And I don't like it!”

They stared at the pile of straw.

“I also hear some sounds from there, especially at night,” Toby said carefully.

“They are rats rustling in the straw,” Edin Ol replied.

“You shouldn't have quarreled with Gregor,” Toby said.

“I didn't quarrel with Gregor,” Bey objected, forcing himself to tear his eyes away from the corner he hated. “I simply explained to him that I was no longer able to pay for his expensive magical experiments and so-called “ingredients”. We had to choose: either this outing, or dubious magical rites!”

“No more dubious than this outing,” Toby said, shivering and looking away from the dark corner too.

“Just rats!” Edin Ol repeated angrily, as if he wanted to convince himself of this first of all.

“We've been in this damn swamp for a month now, and I don't like the way these locals look sideways at us. I don't understand what's on their minds!” Bey was reaching for the mug, but, feeling the pungent smell of bad moonshine, grimacing, set it aside.

“And we came across a skeleton again, this is the second,” said Mike Rout.

This one is much further and not so tangled in thorns.”

“And?” Bey interrupted him skeptically.

“He also has no arm. Again the same as the first one. Have the animals eaten one arm?”

“I don't know!” Bey flared up. “I don't care! I also want to get out of here as soon as possible, like everyone else!”

“Gregor would have been better with us, Bey,” Toby said. “The old swamp man has snake eyes.”

“Well, if they put up with us, then they need it,” Edin objected. He got up from behind a roughly put together low table and, going up to a bench in the corner, pushed it sharply to the side, threw away the straw.

“Edin!” Bey shouted at him, “don't touch anything there for the sake of the Gods!”

“There's nothing here.”

“What's there? Under the straw?” Mike Rout asked curiously.

“Planks of some kind, everything rotten. If you try to pick them up...”

“Edin! Sit down!” Ordered Bey, turning to the rest of the soldiers sitting at the table:

“Okay, we've been sitting here all summer, and where were they sitting? In the quagmire? Locals claim that there is nothing there but mud and water. Where?! Where have they been sitting all this time?!”

Edin Ol returned to the table:

“Now it doesn't matter, Bey, where they were sitting, in the quagmire they ate dirt or in the same hut. They showed up, and this is the main thing. We must go out at dawn!”

“Don't worry, Edin,” Mike Rout said. “They walk so slowly that it won't be difficult to ambush them.”

He chuckled:

“They barely move their legs. It's a pity to watch the girl. Very thin. Maybe they really ate swamp slurry alone. Remember her in Lower, huh? Such a beauty she was, and now she is barely alive.”

“She had to run far from them then,” said Bey, “well, it's her own fault.”

“Yes, she drags around with him, like tied,” agreed Mike, “thin, he seemed to suck her!”

“Damn Devil!” Bey shook his head.

“We grazed them all day until they made a small fire and lay down for the night. They walk slowly, but he keeps the direction right, she trails after him, well, just like on a leash. We came close, close to them, they seemed not to understand anything.”

“What were they talking about? Have you heard?”

“Who?!”

“They!”

“They didn't speak at all! They walked in silence, lit a fire in silence and lay down. I say it looks like both of them don't understand anything. Come and take with your bare hands.”

“Well, so many days to spend no one knows where, exhausted,” said Edin Ol happily, “the easier it will be for us to deal with them.”

“He is alone, and the unclean ones didn't come to his aid,” Mike said. “We checked everything to see if the accomplices were hiding in ambush. There's nobody there.”

“How do you think, why is it so?” Toby asked.

“And how do we know,” Edin waved him off, “it's easier for us!”

“I can't wait to be able to cut off his stupid head!” Bey slammed his fist on the rough tabletop. “How tired I am of him, this damn Son of the Devil! I can't think about anything but about him! And how to take revenge on them all! For the streets, for my girl! I will cut off his head and take it to the prince's estate! I would go out with this Nikto for a one-on-one battle, he was tempting me, but I just don't want to waste time. So we will just shoot him!”

Bey turned to the warrior with the crossbow, who was sitting on a bench by the entrance.

“Shoot and that's done!”

“Okay,” he nodded.

“And then we will cut off his head and take it to the prince! And let's see how he suffers. Just as I suffered for my Jazmina, the prince will suffer for his lover! Yes, Toby?” And Bey laughed unpleasantly.

Toby turned pale, but nodded in agreement.

“And then we will kill Prince Arel.”

“What about the girl? The crossbowman asked. “Should I shoot her too?”

“No. She is noble. Yes, nevertheless you know who her father is, we will return her safe and sound, I have no business with this sir from the Upper and I don't want to have. We must stay away from him, otherwise you won't end up with problems!”

“That's right,” nodded Mike Rout. “We will return her, he will not touch us.”

“He has his own business, and we have ours,” agreed Edin Ole.

“Why this revenge,” Tobias Bat said timidly, “all the same the streets are occupied by Tol and Coal. Nikto and Arel have nothing to do with it now.”

“It is a revenge! Revenge for my Jazmina!”

“But she refused you!”

“Sh-h-h”, Mike Rout hissed, eyes widening.

“She didn’t refuse me, you are a stupid boy and don’t understand anything in the relationship between a man and a woman! She was just humble and clean so that she could agree right away. Therefore, she refused and ran away! This is the usual female coquetry! It is clear, you are still green!”

Toby thought it best to remain silent.

And Bey bared his teeth. He looked sideways at the straw scattered by Edin Ol and the boards lying on the earthen floor, as if covering something.

“Damn this place! I am glad that at dawn we will finally leave here!”

Chapter three

The meeting

At about noon, they went out to an abandoned cemetery. Karina felt uneasy. But not from the sight of cracked gravestones overgrown with weeds and collapsed crypts. No. Some kind of anxiety lodged in her chest, like a premonition of something bad. Something was about to happen. Nikto walked as usual in silence, and she didn’t want to ask him, she felt some kind of evil as if thickening around them, hovering in the air. And yet, despite all the premonitions, Karina cried out in surprise when from behind the ancient crypt several soldiers suddenly came out to meet them.

One of them had jet-black hair tousled, and equally inscrutable black eyes. The pupil in them merged with the iris. Black Bey! This man really had some devilish ability to appear suddenly in the most unexpected place and at the wrong time. He looked at her, clearly hearing her exclamation, and grinned contentedly. His warriors were with him. Karina recognized them: half-blood Toby, Edin Ol, and the man she'd sworn she'd seen several times among the visitors at Backara.

All this lasted literally a few seconds, and then one of Bey's men threw up a crossbow and shot at Nikto. Nikto, who stopped slightly in front, jerked sharply to the side and, bending down to the ground, grabbed his right forearm. At this moment, without hesitation, Karina rushed forward, blocking him from the shooter. She screamed, trying her best to give her voice courage:

“Stop it! Bey! My name is Karina Kors, and my father is the head of the Royal Security Service, he will pay a big ransom for me!”

She spread her arms, trying to cover Nikto with herself as much as possible:

“For me alive!”

“Get out of my way!” Bey growled.

“Order him not to shoot!”

“What are you doing?!” Nikto hissed and, clutching at the shot-through forearm, he tried to move away from Karina.

“I’m returning the debt,” she said abruptly, continuing to shield him with herself, “stop, don’t twitch, you’re injured.”

Bey signaled to his warrior, and he, obeying, lowered his weapon. Karina didn’t take her eyes off him, feverishly assessing the distance. If Bey's people go on the attack, trying to take her alive for ransom, the first thing to do is to try to deprive him of the crossbow, better to take it. It's difficult. What was Nik thinking about? But he stands behind her and waits. Like during their escape from the prison tower. He also stood behind her while she tried to negotiate with the patrolmen. Then nothing came of it, but now? What should they do now?!

Bey's man, although he lowered his weapon, took several steps to the side in their direction, trying to get around. Karina recognized his maneuver instantly.

“Stop where you are!” She moved to the side after him, trying to always be completely turned towards the enemy.

“Crazy, what are you doing!” He shouted, annoyed.

“Shoot her to hell!” Edin Ol swore.

“You don't need a ransom? Big money.”

Karina watched Bey's reaction with a sinking heart and saw that he doubted, the desire to end it immediately with Nikto fought in him with a thirst for money. He slowly raised his sword.

“Take the girl alive!”

Well, at least, the threat of being shot has passed for a while.

Now, as never before, Karina understood what she was doing. If earlier joining Arel's team, the salvation of Nikto from the prison, all her plans and actions were not fully thought out, and were often taken by her simply under the influence of the moment (the salvation of Nikto from the chamber was a vivid proof of this), now she clearly knew that she couldn't allow them to shoot him. And not only because she promised to deliver him to Arel safe and sound, but because of her personal interests too. Wounded or even worse killed, Nikto will not be able to protect her, and what will come to Black Bey's head is unknown, and she didn't want to remain alone with him and his people, even with the promise of ransom. And what kind of inglorious end awaited their journey? Did they come all this long, too long and difficult way to get into the clutches of Bey? Therefore, in no way can they be allowed to get Nikto. They need him, not her. And the ransom beckons Bey, she saw the greedy gleam in his black eyes. Let him go on the attack. Karina will try to neutralize the crossbowman, and Nikto will deal with everyone else. She had no doubt about that. Even though he was wounded in the right forearm, Karina was sure it would not interfere with him. Black Bey and his people were very wrong about the son of the devil!

“Why are you such a coward that you hide behind a woman's back?” Shouted Edin Ol.

“And you?!” Karina immediately didn't remain in debt. “Go, fight him one on one! Why are you covering with arrows?!”

And Bey rushed to the attack, and Karina to the shooter. She was not afraid, fear faded into the background. He was ready to fire again, his hands trembling with tension, but she rushed to him, so straightforwardly substituting, continuing to block the view. It didn't take any trouble to shoot her. But Bey ordered to take her alive. Blocking the view, she prevented him from shooting at Nikto, and besides, she had a sword in her hands, and the warrior threw back the crossbow and drew his sword.

“Mad bitch, how fucking tired I am!” He growled, unable to get rid of Karina, he only defended himself, remembering Bey's order, and at the same time not knowing what to do with her. She was as possessed, as if the devil had possessed her, or rather, so the woe-shooter thought before falling with a mortal wound in his side.

And Nikto came together in a fight with Bey and his people.

Turning around, Karina saw that it was quite difficult for him, but he coped. And it looked very powerful and scary. It finally began to dawn on Bey's warriors that everything was not so simple, and he and the girl were worth a dozen warriors. The circle that was compressing him began to expand. The remaining soldiers were in no hurry to attack. Surrounding Nikto, they just kept him inside. Blood poured down his hand in a stream, flowing over his fingers, but he gripped the sword tightly and, finally getting a respite, turned to Black Bey. Unwittingly, Bey got involved in a kind of one-on-one duel. To give him his due, he did it without hesitation, fiercely and fearlessly. And it was so

powerful that at some point his soldiers and Karina, who was trying to distract Edin Ol from Nikto, froze, looking at them. Without interfering, watching with bated breath, as if this was happening not in a deep forest in an abandoned cemetery, but in the arena of the Coliseum.

Nikto's movements were fascinating, each was brought to automatism, Karina, who studied at the Academy, saw this and understood how he, having made a lunge, returned to a defensive position. It lasted for seconds and the inexperienced viewer, perhaps, didn't notice such trifles. But Karina saw it. Previously, she didn't notice them either, in the heat of escape there was no time for that. And she didn't take his battles in the Coliseum seriously, considering them staged through and through. Now she realized that in a real battle he acted as in a production. This meant that these movements were literally hammered in his subcortex. One – attack, two – starting position, three – defense. One, two, three. One. Two. Three. Like a dance. Karina regretted that the owner of the Lower Coliseum and Dim Al, in pursuit of money, forced him to play, not allowing him to open up.

The frantic fight between Nikto and Bey continued. And despite the mechanical movements of Nikto, the worst thing was not this, but the fact that his face didn't change expression, it was like a mask. Not a single muscle flinched, and the lips were not compressed, maybe even relaxed, not a sound escaped from them. The detached face. This frightened and delighted Karina at the same time. Not human, she thought. Without emotion and impeccably perfected technique, his father would have been proud of him. But he is not human. No improvisation, no risky actions dictated by human emotions, anger or impatience. In her opinion, he missed a few good chances to take risks. But he didn't take the risk. Slowly but surely, step by step, bringing the enemy to the idea that he cannot win. Well-thought-out movements, well-thought-out tactics. Boring, but no risk. Why does he do this? "I'll ask him about it later," thought Karina. While everything is clear anyway, there is too much at stake. And Nikto interferes in the course of events, and Bey's people don't interfere, seeing that there is no direct threat to their master. And Bey is gradually getting tired. Karina, Edin Ol, Tobias Bat, Mike Rout and other remaining warriors stood as if enchanted and looked at this endless duel, which was becoming more and more sluggish, and in the actions of Nikto and the tired Bey, nothing foreshadowed any sharp development of events. And suddenly the observers didn't understand how it happened, but a furious cry, almost an animal howl of Bey, as if brought them out of their torpor or confusion. Bey, who fighting a second ago, was lying on the ground, and his hand, still gripping the sword, lay at a distance, and blood gushed from it like a fountain.

Finally realizing what had happened and will now begin, Karina again rushed at Edin Ol, but he didn't even think to attack. He rushed to Black Bey, picking him up, dragging him away from Nikto. The rest scattered disgracefully. And Nikto was standing. Karina sank to the ground with an exhalation. That was all.

However, she hastened a little in her conclusions, not all of them fled. Toby stood in front of Nikto in a classic stance with a twisted face, his sword tightly gripped in his hand. And Nikto, looking at him, without changing his face, raised his sword too. Their duel, according to the canons of the Academy, didn't last long. Disarmed, Toby was lying on the tombstone in front of his opponent with his hand twisted in a classic manner. For a while they looked at each other as if examining.

"Well? Kill!" Fear flashed in Toby's eyes, but he held out with all his might, trying to look at Nikto with a challenge.

"No," Nikto shook his head, "you are not my enemy."

Toby involuntarily glanced towards the runaway friends.

"Letting go? Are you keeping alive?"

Nikto caught his eye.

“If you want to stay alive, forget about them. And in no case return to the village of swamps.”

Toby's face twisted in fear.

“What? What's there?!”

Nikto didn't answered this question.

“Go out on the tract,” he waved his hand, “this way. And go back to town.”

“What should I do there?!”

“Start a new life. Go to Tol and tell him everything. Say that I asked for you.”

“As if he will believe me!”

“Tol will believe. Return to the “Upper” to the Academy and finish your studies. Find yourself a good girl and forget everything that came before. Forget Arel!”

Toby chuckled bitterly.

“It's easy to say,” he involuntarily ran his fingers over the disfigured mouth. He rose from the slab, looked at Nikto without fear:

“Is it easy for you to forget what's on your face?”

They looked at each other. Nikto bowed to him. Almost face to face. Letting him see himself, his scars, his tattoos on the cheeks.

“This is not about me,” finally said Nikto calmly. “But...” he hesitated, “I'm trying. I'm trying, Toby.”

He flinched when Nikto called him by name.

“You need a family,” Nikto pulled away from him, stepping back and letting him get up.

Toby chuckled bitterly, brushing dust and moss off his clothes.

“And where would you advise me to look for a family? Maybe at the market on a market day?” And he laughed sadly.

“If only so. Good luck!” Nikto turned away from him, leaving.

“And... and to you...” Toby, who had become very serious again, barely uttered.

Nikto approached Karina:

“Let's go,” he said simply.

Karina got up.

“You know,” she said a little later, as they left the woodland cemetery and almost reached the Royal Route. “This is some kind of nightmare, Nik! And the feeling that we were like the heroes of some adventure novel never left me all the time. A very bad novel, I would say!”

Chapter four Encampment

“Let's stop here,” said Nikto, heavily sinking into the grass.

“Yes. Okay,” agreed Karina. She herself liked this cozy forest clearing, surrounded by bushes on all sides. “Here is a small lake, we can wash ourselves.»

“Yes,” Nikto said, and in his voice she felt the fatigue. He sat down on the grass, as usual stretching out his lame leg, and his healthy leg slightly bent at the knee, and, slightly lowering his head, stared blankly in front of him at one point. She saw that he was not at all looking at the clover leaves that grew in abundance there, but was looking at the grass as a background that helped to delve into his thoughts. His eyes were blank, and he stared ahead unseeingly. And Karina, looking at him and remembering what happened to them today, once again thought that his sweet and so soft appearance with delicate neat features, devoid of any brutality and rigidity, didn't at all fit with his actions, with the way he behaved – tough and fearless.

“How can you be so soft on the outside and so strong on the inside!” She thought. “This body doesn't suit him at all. All the same, the men of the “upper white race” are too cute, however, this is not surprising, because they are absolutely peaceful people, not at all like “black” or “red” ones.”

She said:

“You fought so hard now, one against all! Was it very difficult for you?”

“Yes, this was a fucking disaster,” he said, still looking in front of him, in a voice devoid of any intonations, so simple and everyday.

And Karina froze, stunned by such an unexpected response. With his answers, he periodically confused her, she remembered the first time she came to his chamber, all trembling with excitement, expecting that he would start presenting to her now, well, or utter some kind of condemning speech, and he said something in style of “Ask this old asshole to dilute not with water.” And no pathos, did he take it over from Prince Arel or was it he himself? And now she was expecting from him some obviously different words, something heroic: “I didn't give a fuck!” or “All this is nonsense, you see! Who are they before me! I would have dealt with them with one left!”. And he sits here, so tortured, tired, and admits that he was in trouble.

“What?” And Karina laughed.

He looked at her in surprise and smiled too.

And without knowing why, she suddenly reached out and stroked his face, on the unscarred cheek, where there was a black tattoo on the cheekbone. She stroked with tenderness, on his blackened cheekbone, on the ornate letters of the unclean, some with “tails” reaching up to the very eye, others, on the contrary, with “tails” downward in an arc descended from the cheekbone to the cheek. Both of his tattoos on his cheekbones were exactly the same and arranged symmetrically, but she didn't dare to pat him like that gently and on the scarred half of her face, he already raised his eyes at her, full of surprise, and somehow confusedly said:

“Hey, what are you doing?”

Still, she noticed that mischievous sparks flashed in his gaze, and he stopped staring blankly at the clover.

“I'm trying to cheer you up,” she smiled. “Everything will be all right?”

“Yes,” he nodded, “the arm is completely numb.”

Helping himself with his left hand, Nikto pulled off his jacket; everything was soaked in blood through and through.

“You lost a lot of blood. Arel will find a doctor, I think.”

“Not. I will cope myself now,” he reached for the bag, taking out a bottle with “sama”, which Ver brought them to the swamp.

“Will you be able to?” Asked Karina, a little scared.

He didn't answer, still using his left hand – his right one hung like a whip. He unscrewed the lid and moistened a cloth with the medicine.

“You are good at acting with the left hand, I have noticed,” said Karina, carefully observing his actions.

“They often fastened me on the right arm, so I had to learn,” he said, “don't worry and... you better not look.”

“I'm afraid.”

“Don't be afraid,” he said, and applied the medicine to the wound.

And as soon as Nikto applied a cloth that was abundantly moistened with “sama” to the forearm hit by the arrow, his face was contorted with pain. He was literally thrown onto his back, but with his

healthy left hand he still grabbed his forearm with a dead grip, continuing to press the “medicine” to the wound. His body jerked convulsively, his hand finally unclenched, releasing a flap soaked with “sama” and blood, his face turned deathly white, and his eyes rolled back. He lay there, sweeping his long blond hair across the grass, and didn’t move. Had he lost consciousness? Karina got scared:

“Nik? Nik!” She screamed, frightened.

And he stirred. He breathed hoarsely, slowly and somehow awkwardly raised his hands to his throat; his fingers, finding a wide collar, suddenly to Karina’s horror, began to scratch it, as if in a desperate attempt to take it off. Claws scraped against the metal, he grabbed the edge of the collar at the very throat, thrust his fingers under it, and pulled down. It was useless and pointless, and probably even worse because of that – the way he in a helpless attempt tried to free his throat from the slave collar. How convulsively he twitched, trying to pull off the tightly welded collar, which couldn’t be removed, only sawed, and even then, this would obviously take more than one hour of time. Feeling the sealed seam, Nikto froze, staring with dead empty eyes at the sky. His face was distorted by a grimace of some kind of inhuman suffering and hopeless despair, he continued to languidly scratch the metal of the collar with his fingers, then suddenly opened his mouth and seemed to want to scream, but only a dull wheeze escaped from his throat. He wanted to scream, but he couldn’t.

“Gods! He’s a human now!” Flashed through Karina’s head; The demon has lost control. Karina jumped to her brother, lifting him. He sat up, trembling, his mouth was open, but not a sound left his lips, although Karina was sure that he was screaming, screaming from pain and his unbearable condition. His empty blind eyes looked straight ahead and nowhere. His fingers let go of the collar limply. He grabbed his face with his hands, feeling himself the same way as then in the prison chamber, and these convulsive movements frightened Karina more than the Demon himself. Nikto bent over, as if he was about to vomit, grabbed his nose with his fingers, feeling for the rings, trying to unclench and pull out the apparently hated heavy jewelry. He managed to unbend and pull out only one thinnest ring. Blood flowed from the torn nostril. Karina got scared:

“Nik, don’t do it! You can’t pull it out! Special tools are needed! You will only cripple yourself! Don’t do it! These jewelry don’t disfigure you.” She hesitated, realizing that she was talking nonsense. She needed to somehow try to calm him down. To make him stop hurting himself. He hit himself in the head with his fists. She screamed. And suddenly he shuddered, as people usually shudder when they fall asleep. And he stared at her, and, apparently seeing her twisted face, immediately understood everything. He turned away, ripping the rag off his forearm. The wound healed completely, leaving only a white streak of light new skin on the tattoo. And Karina looked at his slave collar and thought that she saw him now in a completely different way. Nikto walked in it, never expressing or showing any inconvenience. He never touched it with his hands in an attempt to remove or adjust it.

He never jerked it with his hands. He slept, ate and drank in it, fucked in it, and for her it was some kind of a part of him. And only now she looked completely differently at this dubious decoration. She suddenly saw with all clarity how thick, wide and certainly heavy it was. She saw the inscriptions engraved on it, the date and place of the stamp, the serial number of the slave. A welded ring to which the chain was to be attached. The demon apparently didn’t care, but the human, her brother, suffered, the collar constrained the movements of his neck and prevented him from breathing. Nikto picked up the torn ring from the grass, took it into his mouth and, drooling to the touch, put it back in his nose, put a rag with the remnants of “sama” to the torn hole in his nostril, winced, but didn’t pass out.

“Why don’t you take off the collar?” Asked Karina. Nikto looked at her warily:

“I’m a slave, have you forgotten?”

“So what? You’ve never led the life of a slave.”

“Really?” Nikto smoothed his hair:

“What do you know about this? I was on the “farm”, and then I was sold to the unclean, and in the city I was in prison and fought like a slave, like meat that is thrown into the front line. I was a great slave!”

“But then, when you met Arel?”

“I became his slave. His whore. Arel liked it, he fastened me to the bed for it, he didn't order me to remove it. It takes a long time. This needs to be cut.”

“I understand. But it was possible to do it! And... And I understand now why you don't! Now it just dawned on me! You don't take it off, not because you're a slave! And not because Arel liked it! You don't take it off, because the slave is my brother! And you show it to him! He, he must walk in this heavy collar, because he is your slave! You don't film to show my brother who he is. And you treat him like a slave. And the joke is that you look like a slave – you!”

“I treat your brother very well, believe me, you just have no idea what a slave should look like in my world. What a collar and what else should he wear! Trust me, this collar is the least of what he should really wear! But this is my body too, so I limit myself to just a few attributes.”

“And the collar among them? Yes?”

“Yes!”

“I want you to take it off.”

“No!”

“But is it comfortable for you yourself?”

“Fine!”

“And he feels bad! Take it off!”

“You want to take it off right now you?! Then cut off my head!”

Karina covered her face with her hands;

“Please don't be angry, please. Maybe it's possible to put a lighter collar on him? How much does this one weigh?”

She raised pleading eyes to him, trying to put into her gaze everything that she felt, all the prayer:

“Please! Come on, when we come to Arel at the Estate, you will order this collar to be cut and put on another one, a little lighter. I am not asking to take it off at all, I understand that he is your slave and should be wearing a collar, no matter how absurd it sounds and looks, because you are one whole.”

“I'll think about it,” Nikto said, and Karina saw that he was not going to respond to her request yet.

“Better make a loofah out of a bunch of grass, as you do, to scrub my clothes. Hey? Get down to business. Your brother is fine, I didn't do with him a hundredth part of what I had to, because I also need this body. That's all. Don't worry about him.”

Karina turned away so that he would not see her tears, and began to tear the grass.

He silently took the twisted bundle of grass from her, went to the water's edge and began to wipe off his boots from the dirt, he was silent and didn't look at her and clearly no longer wanted to continue the conversation about her brother, about the collar, about slavery and the rules of behavior of the Demon in the human body, and the rules of behavior of the human in which the Demon settled. And she looked at him, and before her eyes there was a picture of a creature scratching its collar with its claws, with a face distorted with despair and hopelessness. Blind and dumb.

“Do you know?” She said suddenly.

“What?” He glanced at her from under his brows, not looking up from his occupation.

“Now for the first time you didn't start to play around and come up with excuses, you now for the first time admitted that you are a Demon in my brother's body.”

“So what?”

“Nothing. It's just weird why?”

“Well, you anyway think so?”

“Yes. And I think correctly. It's true. And if had said before, I would not have left. If you were afraid to say, thinking that I would be scared and leave, and you needed me for your witchcraft...”

“Ooh, fuck you,” Nikto drawled. He threw away the grass washcloth and looked at Karina very carefully. “Come here.”

“What for?”

“Are you afraid? How are you going to go to Arel? He is more terrible than me in the way he treats women. And Lis is there.”

“And if I tell them everything? That you are a Demon.”

“They know.”

Karina was taken aback:

“Did you tell them?”

“Come here.”

She came up, and he pulled her to him, brought her face close, looking straight into the eyes.

“Tell them what you want, I don't care. And I told you now simply because now it is possible. But don't ask any more.”

He pushed her away lightly:

“Are you going to wash?”

In the evening they came to the Estate, Nikto led them in roundabout ways, literally in vegetable gardens, so as not to catch the eye of rare peasants, however, most of them, apparently, worked in the fields and didn't meet them. Having gone around a large massive house, Nikto opened some kind of back gate.

“We sneak like thieves,” Karina said.

“Do you want all the servants to stare at you?”

“No.”

And still, in spite of all the precautions, at the very porch they still came across some burly maid, who, seeing strangers coming out from around the corner, gasped, bulging her eyes, and rushed in the opposite direction from them.

Chapter five

Friends

Karina and Nikto entered the house and the main hall of the Estate. Arel and Lis were sitting at the table in front of them. And Lis' face was crudely painted in the way cheap jesters usually paint themselves at fairs. And in his ears, instead of earrings, jester's bells glittered. The absurd make-up distorted his features, and he could only be recognized by his red hair.

“Oh,” Karina involuntarily burst out at the sight of this.

“Hello,” said Nikto, and looking at Lis, too, couldn't resist and grunted.

“Nik! Nik! Gods! My Nik!” Arel shouted, jumping up and not paying any attention to their somewhat dumbfounded appearance. He rushed to Nikto, falling on his knees in front of him and hugging his legs, repeating as if instinctively:

“Nik, Nik, Nik! I don't believe in this happiness!”

Nikto bent down to hug him and lift him from his knees. He smiled:

“I'm back,” he said. And Arel showered him with kisses, kissed his hands, and there were tears in his eyes.

Karina sat down wearily on the bench at the entrance. The prince, not paying any attention to her, dragged Nikto with him deep into the room, to the stairs leading to the second floor of the house.

“Come on, come with me,” he literally dragged Nikto behind him, and he, without resisting, followed him.

Karina and Lis stayed in the room together. She was afraid to look up so as not to meet his eyes. He looked so terrible, so shameful. However, Prince Arel didn't look better. She remembered how she missed them and regretted that she had left the Castle then. As she looked from afar, sitting in the lower Coliseum at the final fight of Nikto. How she worried about Arel when he was beaten during interrogation. And now there they were, close again. Arel was so sharp, impulsive, as always, it seemed to her that he was not sober. Has he ever been sober at all? The prince was now very close, and she felt nothing, no joy or awe. He was dressed bad, without jewelry, also barefoot, somehow all careless, sloppy. His dark hair was not combed, it was disheveled, in tangles, it fell in untidy strands on his face as he spread, crawling in front of his Nikto. And this tattoo of his, she forgot about it, and now she saw it so clearly; a black dragon on his entire cheek, really on half of his face (as it seemed to her) caught her eye. She was generally afraid to look up at Lis, he was also not combed, his hair was pulled away raggedly, he looked better on trial. And now they seem to have completely sunk down. She didn't even want to think about the fact that his nose and mouth were painted red. Arel painted him like a jester, and Lis allowed it to him again. As well as when they put on him a “shameful strip” with bells. What a fool? And so she sat, afraid to move and look up, not understanding what she was doing here and what was next. She looked up only when she heard that Lis was getting up from his place, the bells rang, and he went up to her. Their eyes met, he looked at her from top to bottom, looked with challenge and, as it seemed to her, with anger. In fright and confusion, she lowered her eyes again, and then he grabbed her by the forearm, pulling her upward, lifting her from the bench. He struck her backhand, she clenched her teeth, not uttering a sound. He struck again, throwing her in the middle of the room to the table. Karina seemed to be numb, not resisting. Lis grabbed her and threw her roughly on the trestle bed in the corner of the room.

Approaching her, he began to tear off her clothes. She let him do whatever he wanted. The bells in his ears rang unbearably and out of tune when he, crushing it under him, leaning on top, feverishly fucking her, breathing heavily and hoarsely, all his actions and movements – everything was with force, roughness, with some kind of anguish. He quickly froze on her, the bells fell silent, and she heard his heart pounding wildly in her chest. Karina stretched out her arms and hugged him, hugged him, holding him closer to her, squeezed his head with her palms, turning his face, no longer distorted by malice, towards her. He tried to turn away, looking away. His mouth, painted in red, smiled from ear to ear. He pushed her away, getting up, walking away.

He sat down at the table, she remained lying, there was no strength to get up, there was no strength to say anything. This is just the beginning, she thought. “Forgive me, dad.”

So they sat in silence until dusk thickened over the house and the room became almost dark; Karina dozed off, she saw that Lis was smoking, lighting a cigarette from one another. And he didn't touch either the wine or the food on the table.

Arel dragged Nikto upstairs to his room.

“You're back! You have returned!” He whispered, falling back on the bed, and throwing Nikto onto himself. His eyes, looking at Nikto, were empty. In them there was only animal passion. “I've been waiting for you for so long,” he whispered rapidly, frantically pulling off his clothes; every minute of delay seemed to torment him. Nothing interested Arel, how Nikto managed to escape, what happened to him during this time, why did he not come alone, but with Karina, how does he feel?

Nikto squeezed his throat with his hands, and Arel suffocated, already in pre-orgasmic ecstasy.

“Was that what you expected?” Nikto asked.

Arel didn't answer. Nikto let him go, silently undressing, he tossed aside his jacket, the sleeve of which was hardened with blood. He saw how his Arel was languishing with impatience, and his every touch causes a rush of desire. Squeezing him tightly in his hands, Nikto did what his prince so desired.

More and more, more and more orgasms. Sperm splashed from Arel's dick on his belly, and on the belly of Nikto pressed against him. Powerful thrusts; Arel leaned forward, not holding back groans.

"Turn me over!"

Nikto complied with his request. A new orgasm.

"Take me by the hair!"

Nikto wrapped his hair around his fist, as he often used to do. He pressed his face into the pillow and came into Orel. He, realizing this, turned around and, wrapping his lips around his penis, began to suck with all passion, with all diligence, not allowing the erection to go away. Nikto allowed him to do it. Arel swallowed his semen. Nikto forced him into the headboard, hitting his back on the boards, and Arel shouted:

"Yes! Yes!"

Nikto entered him again. It seemed that Arel was about to lose consciousness. This went on for quite a long time. When Nikto finally released him, Arel lay for some time without moving, his eyes closed, and only later opened them. Finally he looked at Nikto knowingly, with recognition in the sight. Looking at him.

"It's you," he said quietly, "you're back!"

His look was full of love and adoration. He literally fell in front of Nikto sitting on the bed, prostrated before him, hugged his knees, kissing, spreading out in front of him, at his feet.

"I love you! I adore you! You are my God! My sir! My lord! Do with me whatever you want, whatever you want! I'm all yours! Do something with me! Do it! Do it!"

Nikto leaned back on the bed, lay on his back:

"Enough, Arel! You're too hungry. I'm tired."

"Yes. Yes! I'm hungry for you. Hungry for my Demon Master!"

"Enough!" Nikto shouted.

Arel froze, offended, tears glistened in his eyes.

"I... I've just madly missed you, my beloved," he drawled a little resentfully.

Nikto pulled him with his hand to him:

"Well, quietly, quietly, don't start hysteria. Forgive me. I also really love you! Never again! Do you hear?! Never! I will not leave you anymore. And we will have a lot of time. I will screw you up and wipe you out so that you will even regret that I am back!"

"I will never regret! Even if you cut me to pieces!"

"I know you want it, but not all at once, okay? I didn't come alone, and I promised to protect her. You will call Karina and tell her that you will not do anything bad to her and let her go."

"Well," without hesitation, agreed Arel; it was clear that he absolutely didn't care about Karina and anyone else, and he didn't think about it at all. All his thoughts were only about Nikto.

"Give me my pants and cigarettes," Nikto ordered him.

Arel rushed to obey the order.

"You have gained weight," Nikto chuckled, lighting a cigarette, "got fatter."

Arel froze:

"Yes, I have gained a little weight," he said in horror, "is it too bad? Yes? Don't you want me anymore?"

"Don't talk nonsense! You just look healthy."

"Really?"

"Yes!" Nikto took a deep drag, "you ate here, had fun with Lis."

"No! No! I almost died without you! Don't say that! What could I do?! It was necessary to live on somehow!"

"Well, of course..."

Arel again threw himself at the feet of Nikto. He raised him:

"What is it?" he pointed to the trail of a red-hot poker, an L-shaped burn on Arel's chest.

“I got burned when I was drunk,” answered Arel quickly, “when I lit a cigarette from the fireplace poker.”

And although these words were spoken as if nothing had happened, in an indifferent voice, Arel still trembled under the gaze of Nikto, treacherously turned his eyes to the side.

“Burned,” repeated Nikto. Putting out his cigarette on the bottom of the ashtray, he somehow strangely kept his eyes on it, as if remembering something, then lay down on his side, turning away.

“Well,” Arel was clearly nervous, “but this is nonsense, Nik, I was drunk, I'm telling you.”

He tried to turn Nobody back to him. But he didn't give in.

“Nik, don't you believe me?”

“You wanted to show off in front of Lis, you're lying to me...”

“Well, Nik!”

“And so neat!”

“What's that? Are you jealous?! Nik, this is stupid!”

“Then why are you lying!” Nikto got up, sat on the bed, again looking at Arel point-blank.

“Why do you lie to me?!”

Arel grabbed his head:

“I'm not lying!”

“Arel! Prince! Are you completely out of your mind?! Forgot who I am?!”

“Son of Devil?” Arel asked carefully.

“Yeah. And you are lying to me!”

“You are jealous! Nik! Nik, I just figured it wouldn't mean anything to you!”

“I'm unpleased,” Nikto lowered his tone and reached for cigarettes again:

“You pulled out the earrings, took off everything that I gave you.”

“Not everything,” somehow unconvincingly mumbled Arel. “I didn't get everything out.”

He pointed to his chest. The heavy nipple rings were removed. Although the holes left from them were still visible, they were half healed, and the nipples themselves, without heavy decorations, were not pulled back, they almost recovered. But the pins sticking out above and below the nipple halo remained.

“You didn't pull it out simply because you couldn't,” said Nikto. “Inside,” he jabbed his finger into Arel's chest, “there is another pin inserted into them. You pulled the top, but the horizontal stick stops you. That's why you didn't pull them out. It hurts you.”

“Yes, I realized that there is something like a cross inside me,” said Arel.

“You haven't understand,” Nikto grinned skeptically, “anything! Lis explained it to you!”

“Well, that's enough!” Arel shouted.

“Don't shout!” Nikto grabbed his face, closing his mouth, clutching his cheeks with his fingers:

“And you would have erased my brand if you could!”

He pulled back Arel's cheek with the dragon depicted on it:

“You have erased my one, and stamped his one!”

“Nik... forgive me... I... I just... didn't think it would be so important to you,” the poor Arel barely babbled. “I was very worried. I couldn't sleep from longing for you. I rolled from side to side every night, trying to sleep, even alcohol didn't help much! And it seemed to me that they were interfering with me. Especially rings in the ears.”

Nikto let go of him roughly, pushing him away easily. He lit the thrown cigarette again:

“And you didn't tell me: “It doesn't mean anything to me, I was just fooled when I was drunk”. You haven't betrayed Lis! You said, “I thought it wouldn't mean anything to you!” So it means nothing to me? And for you it really matters!”

Arel looked at him stunned:

“Are you having fun now? Nik? Are you portraying a scene of jealousy? Does it turn you on or what? You know perfectly well that I love only you! That I'm literally obsessed with you! You just want to fool me!”

“No,” Nikto shook his head, “I'm really jealous.”

“Really?! You... You love me so that you are jealous?! I can't believe my ears! And do you care?! But... but... you must not be jealous of Lis. You see, there are people with whom I am close, I don't know why; I feel this closeness, as if I touch souls, and with Lis I feel this touch. I loved all my people, I talked a lot with Enriki, and I love Tol. But this recognition, unconditional acceptance, even if the mind doesn't agree, I felt only for Lis and Squint-Eye. But don't look at me like that now! I still tried to suppress them, break them. And yet, I always feel superior. I'm a prince! I am true black! And Lis – well, Lis no matter what contact of souls I feel with him and towards him, I am still the chosen one, and he is a red-haired half-blood! He's red, you know? He's no match for me anyway! No man is my equal! You have nothing to be jealous of.”

“Are only Demons equal to you?”

“Yes! If you want so!”

And seeing a little mocking look of Nikto, Arel got angry:

“And enough about that now! Did you tell me something about Karina? So dress up, I'll call her.”

“And feed us.”

“Yes of course! Forgive me!”

“Do you have clothes? My jacket is ruined, my boots are broken.”

“Your favorite new boots ?! Oh! What about the jacket? Have you been hurt? Gods! What an egoist I am! I didn't think about you!”

Nikto chuckled:

“It's all right, Arel, you see, I even had the strength to fuck you, even though I hung out in the woods for several months.”

“You came from the forest, and you smelled like from a perfume shop,” Arel laughed.

“Well, we spent half a day by the river,” Nikto explained. “We licked our wounds and washed ourselves. I perfumed myself with Karina's perfume,” he laughed, “to come to my prince in full rig!”

“I would accept you in any rig! That's silly! You spent there half a day, it would be better to come faster!”

“I needed to heal a wound on my arm.”

“Who hurt you?!”

“I'll tell you everything later, okay? We still have a lot of time ahead. We will discuss everything.”

With the phrase “we will discuss everything” Arel tensed again and therefore thought it best to say: “Well, I'll call Karina and Lis?”

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