

Stage II

A Debt Repaid

Act 4

Plop

Gustave flopped himself back into a nice big leather recliner with his head thrown back, the biggest of big yawns escaping him. Across the way sat Alexander, leaned back into his chair with a leg crossed over. Almec stood near Gustave, whilst the young ones all sat around another table nearby with a couple of chairs. A few goons stood near the children, one of whom was actively wrapping up William's right arm with bandages and applying some cloth to his right eye.

"Raikor Termonte. Have to say I really wasn't expecting to see you ever again," Alex spoke aloud, leaning his own head back now against the chair's rest.

"Alexander," Almec, or rather Raikor, growled, "How are you even still alive?"

"Pffft- as if I could get so lucky as to die," he muttered, perking up right then after, "Nah, I've been in exile ever since the Terminator Wars ended. About the same as you, aye? Pretty sure all of the other Taoreta died, and here you are with a new name and look."

"... I don't owe you an explanation. I don't owe you, and I don't owe that infernal brother of yours shit."

"Mmm... eh, fair enough," he murmured shutting his eyes, "If only I had known, I would've let us both get blown up. No matter. So tell me Raikor-"

"It's *Almec* now."

"Whatever- Almec. So what's your deal? Coming in here and punting a hornet nest into a brick wall? You know damn well Virgil won't let that one slide, right?"

"I am well aware," Almec grumbled, slumping back against the wall, "That was no different than signing our death warrants. Best thing for us is to move on quickly-"

"Why don't you just kill him?" William asked with a slight grunt as a bandage was tightened.

“Oh- one doesn’t just kill a Lord like it’s nothing kid. There are rules to the game that Gorgon is playing now,” Alexander replied.

“Lord?” Danielle questioned looking to the white haired man.

His eyes opened, a slight grin curving as he gave back a nod, “Indeed. Your old boss has obtained a lot of power in recent times. Ever since the Dusk Wars, a lot of groups have been eating up turf and resources. Gorgon has grown into a menace with all of his connections.”

“... so that’s why you can’t touch him then-” she whimpered softly.

“I don’t get it? What are these rules? Why can’t you just bump him off?” Will again asked.

“Will, hush,” Almec grumbled.

Alexander blinked, his posture changing as to look over now to the trio of youngsters, “You ever kill a *Lord* before? If you’ve been paying attention to the reports of that Great War going on across the realms you should know.”

“...?”

“*Sigh* Have you taught them nothing? Look- when you take out a political powerhouse, it creates a vacuum. No different than the War of the Great Powers. Destabilizing a system without a plan is a mess... PLUS, Gorgon has a particular reputation and uh... yeah, he’s not worth crossing even if you manage to kill ‘em.”

“That... that sucks-”

“Doesn’t it?”

“... so,” Raven interrupted, “How do you know Danielle and Almec? You said something about not being into revenge. What revenge?”

Danielle glanced away, saying nothing.

“Oh, that all goes back to the Home Lands of Psony-3. It’s a long story but uh, Almec and I used to work for the same team. We fought for peace and justice, or at least the disillusion we accepted as peace and justice. As for Danielle there, well, that’s a complicated story.”

“...?”

“Danielle, for what it’s worth... I don’t give a fuck about any of that.”

“?!”

Her head popped up instantly, returning gaze to Alex.

“My brother was a psychopath hellbent on destruction after the Terminator Wars. I would’ve killed him myself if I were able to, if not for the Blackheart Curse. Funnily enough that curse is broken now, no need to be wholesome with the fam if I don’t want to but-”

“Sorry to interrupt but we need to get a move on,” Almec grumbled in interruption, turning his attention back to Gustave, “We have business with that one.”

“And what business is it that you’re looking to do, exactly?” Alex retorted, “I assume if you’re going to Gus then you’re looking to get away, be it here in the Demon World or to another- but again, that’s no longer an option. Hornets will be on you the second you leave the pond.”

Almec scowled, glaring back at the white haired man. Danielle herself glanced aside, eyeing the ground.

“So what would YOU propose we do then, do nothing?” Almec growled.

“Why must you be so hostile AI? I really don’t appreciate it. Now I do have a suggestion, buuuuuut-”

Alex shifted his gaze, looking from Almec now right towards Danielle. She remained sighted on the floor while her allies kept their own focals on Alex. Gus and his goons remained as is.

“What is it?” Almec questioned.

“... I can go ahead and deal with Virgil, if you’d like.”

A very evident shiver crawled up her body from her feet to her head. A spasm. A few rapid blinks, eyes big and shaken. Almec’s sights shot back to Alexander who sat there, a leg kicked up. Gus’s jaw hung, the two adolescents both looking.

“But didn’t you just-” William began.

“You would kill a Lord?” Gustave interrupted.

“Whoa now- who said anything about killing? I mean, not like it’s impossible. Not like I’m not for it. Man’s a scumbag. Though maybe... that and I do have this debt to repay I suppose so.”

“And why would you give it any consideration? After everything you just said would happen?” Almec questioned with a growl.

Alexander shifted his gaze to Almec for a short order, then a glance back towards Danielle. Her face flushed, pale where there was no red. The quiver, the wrinkles.

“Do I really need to give a reason proper? You and I both know what kind of man he is. He should be dead. Just have to figure out how to do it with the least amount of collateral after he goes down.”

“Please, don’t kill him on my account,” Danielle spoke aloud, her sights shifting.

“Danielle?” Almec questioned softly as they all looked to her.

She looked back down with a quiver, “Virgil Gorgon... he’s a monster but- he has his place. He keeps so many groups in check and... and that REALLY helps everyone down here.”

She glanced up.

“If he’s taken out, it’ll make it worse. Like you said.”

“And what if the man should continue to hunt you Danielle?” Alex questioned, gaze narrowing, “He knows you’re alive. You know how he functions. If he thinks he owns you, he’ll stop at nothing to get you. That’s just the type of bloody sociopath he is. No guarantee he’d even let the other three go.”

“It’s better than the chaos that would follow if he were removed.”

“Dani- the man’s a monster. How can letting him live be-” Will began.

He shuffled himself, placing his leg back down. Leaning ahead, his right elbow rest upon the arm rest of the chair and his chin upon his palm.

“Simple Danielle. You come from a place where forced removal has consistently led to tragedy. It is understandable. Though would you truly damn you friends here to being hunted? And what of the countless other lives he will ensnare? Is it not valid to simply remove the poison before it can spread, even if the resulting amputation is life-altering?”

“... Leo and Zero would’ve pulled the weed without understanding the roll it plays in protecting the garden. You’re starting to sound as pitiful as the two of them, willing to let the world burn so you can achieve some idiotic vision of success and peace. Where does it end?!”

“Heh,” Alex chuckled as the rest of the group watched on.

Gus’s eyes shifted rapidly. Sweat spread from the faces of the goons, looks of worry crossing the two twins. Almec himself allowed for his scowl to fade back and become a grunted discomfort. Both Alexander and Danielle were locked to one another, the latter glaring, the former observing calmly.

“Heh- hahahahaha!!” he laughed throwing his head back.

“Funny is it?”

“Hahaha- oh mildly, yes,” he concluded, smirking, “I was right about you. Your time with my brother has taught you well...”

“How so?”

“Oh, you are more right than you realize my dear. This is the reason why I’ve stayed out of the world’s affairs for as long as I have.”

“...”

“Chaos is part of the natural order. It is a flow, much like a river. You can dam it as much as you want, you can redirect the course as many times as you’d like; but nature bends to no one’s whim. Control is temporary at best, never long lasting. It will correct itself, either with an explosive howl blowing over or through sporadic deviations that make the walls pointless.”

“Yet you’ve come back looking to stir the pot. Hypocritical much?”

“Well- part of being alive is being a little hypocritical. I know I can’t stop the passage; but I can at least steer it out of the way of the town for just long enough to enact some form of secondary plan. And THAT- brings me to my next point.”

“Which is?” Almec questioned.

“The only way your crew will be safe, is to fall under the banner of another *Lord*. Be them a War Lord or an Over Lord, it matters not. Problem being though-” he trailed off while looking over to William and Raven, “I would suspect that such a life would not suit them. You two veterans sure; but not those two... and I suspect that you, Almec, are tethered to them. So if they can not follow this path and you must follow them, that leaves-”

Danielle’s shaking stopped, a shiver of a glance up.

STOMP!!

“ALEXANDER!” Almec howl stomping straight up.

“What? Just speaking the truth mate.”

“You have no right! Insinuating that we split our quartet up, you can not. She shouldn’t have to choose something like that! Has she not seen enough hell already?!”

“I do believe I can insinuate it Almec, and so I shall because that is simply how it is. If Virgil hunts her without splitting off, then those two are endangered. If you flock to another Lord for protection then you’re pushing the same criminal lifestyle on them that you’ve both had to endure. They are not accustomed to what both you and Danielle have dealt with. And I would not

and could not tell you to tell the kids to get lost in a dumpster somewhere. That would be unethical.”

“Bastard!”

“Almec please-” Danielle choked out, “It’s... it’s fine.”

“D-Danielle?”

“Dani?”

The young girl stood, shaken, her head whipped back and her sights set on Alexander, “I... I will not put them through this.”

“Danielle you don’t hav-”

“I do, Almec,” she interrupted turning back around to look at the elder man, “I made this bed decades ago when I was just a dumb stupid nobody. I can’t run. Either I die, or I play by the rules. Will and Rae both have a choice yet- and I won’t force this upon them. It’s my burden. Not yours, and not theirs... but-”

She shot back around, staring straight at Alexander.

“I will not be made the slave of another monster. I’ve worked with too many of those and I’d sooner be dead than cause any more harm!”

“Mmm... fair enough. I won’t force anything on you. If you’d like you can stick around me under my banner until we find you a permanent residence. Or, ya know, until Virgil forces my hand and I break his neck. I promise- I’m nowhere near the level of dickishness that my brothers had. Yeah I can be a bit of a dick but nothing like that. In fact- hell, you might even like some of the jobs I pull. Bit of uh, bit of revenge for you, I suppose.”

“Yeah... you mentioned a debt. That’ll be fine.”

“Then we have an accord. Marvelous~”

“Danielle... are you sure?” Almec murmured walking up to her.

“It’s this or nothing Almec,” she murmured in return.

“You have nothing to worry about Almec; but then again I suppose just about anyone will say that nowadays. But you’ll see why for yourself, because you’re coming with~”

“Eh?”

“What?!”

Her eyes shot wide open and set on Alexander, he who was positioned with a devilish grin staring at Almec.

“Shocking, isn’t it? As if Virgil would let any of you go from here-” Alex continued.

“But didn’t you just...” Danielle began.

“Forget what I said. Those two will be fine, heh heh. I just wanted to see where you were on this journey of yours dear.”

Stare

“Your willingness to sacrifice yourself for your allies, and Almec’s consideration of your position and the needs of your little quartet here. Should you decide to part ways after we figure out a proper accord then so be it; but for now-” he trailed off as he moved to stand right back up, “You’ll all be under my protection for the time being.”

His eyes shifted again.

“Gus you might want to make yourself scarce. Virgil should leave you alone if I had to guess but you never know.”

“Eh- heh heh heh, right right yes of course uhuh mmm... yes, I will do just that, nooooohoho worries there my friend.”

“Good,” he grumbled rising straight up out of his seat, staring out across the room, “Then shall we be on our way?”

“Danielle. Are you sure about doing this?” Almec questioned.

“... I have my reservations about working with another Blackheart, Almec, I do... but right now it’s our best shot at getting out of this alive.”

She turned to Alexander, nodding.

“Where are we off to?”

“I have a ship docked at the south harbor. Should be rather simple. I doubt Virgil would cross me within the city limits.”

“Uh... no-” one of the goons standing near the door stated, a hand raised to their right ear, “But the Federation might.”

CRASH CLANG- **Breaking Glass**

The sounds of screaming, muffled behind the door and echoing off the hallway walls. All around the room there were jumps. All of them, aside from Alexander and Almec, had shot up. All with jumps, all setting sights towards the door and in turn the source of the noises themselves.

Almec flipped just the same- Alexander though, he simply stared towards that door.

“Looking for Virgil no doubt,” Alexander grumbled, “Pitiful bastard. No doubt split just after being spotted.”

“Hey, this is our chance!” William shouted.

“Chance?” Danielle questioned.

“Hmm?” Alex mused.

“We don’t need the Blackheart’s assistance. We can get out of this! Virgil won’t be near the Feds, he’s long gone. We can slip out in the chaos!!”

“Heyyy that’s a good point!” Raven chirped.

“But-”

“Come on!” William shouted, bursting forth and flying straight out of the door upon shoving it open.

Raven followed close behind, shouting- “Wait up!”

“GRRR- You two get back here!” Almec hissed, quickly tearing off after them.

“A-Almec wait!” Danielle yelled taking to her feet right then after and bolting out of the room.

“Bu-wait!” Gus shouted.

“Gus my friend you should make yourself scarce,” Alexander spoke, walking up and just passing the man, “Exit out the back entrance and go through the tunnels. That’s exactly how Virgil got in here I’d wager and I doubt the Feds would know of it.”

“Heh heh, yes sir you don’t have to tell me that twice now. And what of you my friend?”

“Dunno,” he spoke stopping at the door, turning back, “See where this goes. Maybe I’ll finally get lucky and get offed.”