

Ii.  
The First Pact

Three weeks passed into the Spring after their meeting. Eris was sitting at her kitchen's center counter staring downwards at her tablet. Engineering sent over a few prototype designs for the tracking device. She was making her notes while she waited for the sound of the kettle. Behind her was a large bay-styled window that overlooked the backyard of her manor. The Dagenhart Estates was frankly an inappropriate title. The property was the size of a modern compound. It was entirely too expansive to walk without knowing where to go. The property held several buildings: meeting halls, event buildings, training fields, man-made lakes, stables, and of course, the manors. Augustine's, Waverly's, and Eris's.

Eris had recently come into the possession of her manor some three years prior. Previously, the home belong to her mother. After her mother's death, Eris lived with her grandfather until college. When she turned twenty-five she took over her ancestral home. Three years later she was still renovating. The old money ornate drab decor wasn't to her taste. She was remodeling the manor to feel like a home. Eris decided on the Modern Farmhouse style. Something sleek yet comfortably rustic. After working in a lab or mentoring with her grandfather all day, she simply wanted to come home, shower, curl up in a pile of plush blankets and release her tendrils.

Her tendrils currently swayed effortlessly from her back. They swam in the air, free from entanglement; each tendril slick and black. The sunlight made them glisten causing them to shine prisms on near walls and reflective surfaces. The reflective rainbow bounced from her tendril onto her glass. The pleasant glow caught her attention before her security detail did.

The armored Knight stopped just before entering the kitchen, "Madam, you have a guest. He says that you should be expecting him." Her gaze slowly drifted to the Knight; he was nervous. She could smell it, but the fellow task for the day detail held his own. Then she could smell something else. She caught the scent of her guest and grinned. "Lord Octavian Lennox."

A low rumble was heard before Lord Lennox sauntered into view. He wasn't pleased; Octavian sucked the air between his teeth as he was introduced.

"It's not like I said it." She chuckled at his displeasure. . Eris dismissed the guard. " Nor did I know I was to be expecting you. You're timing, however, is perfect. I was just about to make breakfast, care to join?"

Octavian waited until the guard was out of their earshot before he spoke, and when he did his tone betrayed him. And she took note. His eyes softened, his muscles relaxed and he tilted his head as if the question was necessary. "I could always eat." Octavian removed his coat and suit jacket before rolling up his sleeves. For a brief moment, the Tribunal was mesmerized by the tendrils waving free. He'd never seen Augustine's tendrils free in such a manner. Her predecessors were ridged, jagged, and overall uninviting. Eris' they appeared soft, comforting...inviting. He cleared his throat before she noticed that he was getting lost again. "Ms. Dagenhart, your staff are very is very--"

"Loyal and astute." She finished his sentence. Before walking over to the sink to wash her hands; he followed suit. "Also, my tendrils are out and I have no intentions of putting them away. So please, no formalities." She laughed. It was the truth. Eris had to constantly be on her guard. There was deepening distrust within the Order of Erebus, and they have just enacted a pact that would change the way the history of the Order as they knew it. The Dagenhart compound was her place of solace. It was her calm within the storm, it was her home and she would be comfortable and she willingly invited those to do the same. If they could not find their welcome, then that was on them.

"So what brings you? It can't possibly be the prototypes. I got them this morning and just started looking them over."

Octavian washed his hands and waited for her direction. It was a large kitchen, however, 1 cook in the kitchen was more often than enough. But he was invited into a sacred space and he was

there to oblige. "I had a chat with a few of the Independent Knights. And-"

"Already?" Her eyes widened, handing him an apron "Why-"

"I have not told them about our venture." Octavian took the apron, reassuring her. "No, I asked my crew how they would feel if they had to host a Squire in the ranks for a mission. I didn't resist when they asked me who." He raised a brow watching her as she started to grab an array of items from the refrigerator and cupboards. She took each item and laid them out methodically, shifting the alphabetic order with each item. It gave him pause from his current thought. *Was she clearing out her fridge?*

It was hard for Eris not to snicker, she gave her back to her guest as she continued pulling out food. Eggs, ingredients for at least 2 different batter types, from what Octavian could tell. Sausages, links, patties, bacon. Thick cuts of applewood bacon. He was near salivation from sight. Then his eyes peered to Eris still leaning over grabbing seasonings.

"Gods, lass." He muttered with a half chuckle catching himself leering. "W-Who are you cooking for? I've got a belly but even I have a limit."

A small laugh escaped her, "I pack away a lot despite my size. *'Our hunger is insatiable'*" She rolled her eyes quoting the old tomes. "Plus, I enjoy cooking. It helps me clear my mind and poof- schematics for a prototype. Plus, food. What kinda Waffles and Pancakes? Chocolate or Blueberry.

Octavian sighed, part of him wished he was more prepared. "I might regret this but, Chocolate pancakes and Blueberry Muffins." Unconsciously he reached for the plastic container of blueberry at the same time as one of her tendrils. His knuckles gently grazed the stygian appendage. His expression revealed more shock than his body could compute. Octavian didn't exactly know what he was expecting. He imagined that they were inky or slick to the touch due to the vibrance of the shade. The absence of light was naturally indicative of the cold. Her

tendrils were warm and inviting. That was the shock, despite their cruel and calculating nature... the tendrils were tender.

"Excuse me- I" Octavian stammered. "Are you always this warm?" The stammer turned to a whisper. He pulled his hand away looking at her curiously just as she looked curiously back to him.

Though, Eris was fighting the snort at the back of her throat and stamped down the grin forming on her face. She took a deep breath and raised her hand palm out for him to touch. "See for yourself."

Without hesitation, to Eris's surprise, Octavian leaned forward lowering his head into her palm. Just as she felt Octavian's stubble meet her hand she heard and felt him suck in a breath.

"Gods, you're bloody baltic." He gasped, but instead of recoiling like he did with her tendrils; he pressed his face further into her palm, nuzzling into the chill of her skin. His eyes drowned in her own pools of golden before bringing his hand over hers, pressing further into her touch wanting to sink into her. Without warning and with great speed, Eris found just his free hand on her throat. Octavian didn't apply pressure, his palm lingering on her pulse while his large thumb traveled to a bit of darkness that trailed just behind her ear.

"The Lama Kiri keeps you warm?" he chuckled still in her palm. His intrusive fascination nearly distracted him from the brief tension in her jaw, at his sudden caress. Nearly. Gingerly, one of her tendrils coiled around the arm that was attached to the hand that was mapping her skin... the warmth radiated in the snake pattern. Octavian chuckled; finally breaking his unnervingly focused gaze from hers to the tendril and then back to Eris. "I tell you what," He slid his hand away from her throat and nuzzled her palm once more before standing straight shifting his spine a bit. "I could use a warm-up before eating and you... need to warm up. We can have a quick workout to do just that-"

Eris stared. She stared blankly at him for what felt like a solid five minutes but merely five seconds passed. She was astounded at the complete forwardness. She stammered. "In. The. Kitchen?"

"What? No, outside. There's more room, We'd destroy this entire room." He laughed shaking his head before looking over his shoulders towards her bay window. " Maybe just outside of the maze there--"

"In the BROAD DAYLIGHT? Octavian?!" Her eyes were wide and growing. "Also, I have wolves--"

"Wait- Wolv--"

"Marguerite said that you'd get fresh the first chance you got!"

"WAIT. WAIT." It dawned on him that they were having... two separate conversations. The color of his cheeks betrayed him. "Firstly, that old Spider has no right to slander, secondly I was not talking about having sex." He reassured. " Honestly,"

"My apologies-I" Eris started.

"But it's not slander if it's true to an extent--"

"Start scrambling the eggs!" She blushed pointing to the dozen eggs before him.

Octavian snorted and did as he was demanded. "Seriously, why are you so damn cold?"

"Short answer is my biology. My mother was created and my father a human Shadowmancer, possibly eaten"

"What--" He stammered.

Without missing a beat Eris pointed to the pan. "Eggs. Bacon and Sausage, cook!." She hid a chuckle at the man's confusion.

"You don't even know, do you?" Octavian poured the eggs.

"I know what I'm not" The words were almost sing-song as she moved on to making pancakes. "Enough about why I'm cold, What were you saying?"

"Oh, yes." Octavian started flipping the sausage and bacon. "The crew I spoke with knew exactly who you were and said that you did a lovely impression of your grandfather while making the Hunter's Biddings. They said that they actually boost morale. They howled when I proposed that you come along. So will you join us?" He gingerly looked over to her as he continued the elaborate breakfast.

"Who all is coming?" She teased. "Yes. Any chance, I get I take to get into the thick of it."

He sighed a bit "You may not be the only Squire, one of the Spiders is trying to get me to allow space for their chosen, but I don't think he's ready. Especially, for what we're getting ready to do..."

On Augustine Dagenhart's side of the compound, Marguerite Carlisle called an impromptu meeting.

"We saw Eris convening with the Judas Priest and Niko." Marguerite sipped her tea "Have any idea what transpired."

"What a strange way to say hello." Augustine sighed crossing his legs before sipping his tea. "Hello, Maggie... it's a lovely day today-" Sarcasm dripped from his lips chuckling behind his cup.

She quickly shot the man a glare not wanting to spin time on formal small talk before cutting to the heart of the matter. "What is Eris doing with the Hippie and the Judas Priest?"

"Why do you assume I know all the affairs of my granddaughter? Maybe she just wanted to get high? Nothing Nefarious there..." He sipped his tea with a glint in his eye knowing that he was getting on the elder twin's nerves. "I've see you-"

"I don't care if they get high!" She seethed. "I don't trust Lennox."

"Nor do I. If she is keeping his company, I imagine it's for good reason. His company is a sour one and I'm sure she's already found that out. She's not a child anymore. So I--"

"Speaking of Children, our Grandson and your Granddaughter are to get acquainted." Maggie interrupted. "I'm sure she'd find the company of spider must more receptive. Just imagine it. How strong our Houses can become if they joined. Wolf and Spider side by side snuffing out the light. Together we could breed talent and numbers."

"Your sister was right, today you're not pussyfooting around." The gentlemen sighed. "You know how I feel about arranging anything with Eris. I even hated arranging playdates after the first incident. But this is something larger, you want to arrange a marriage, a fearful one at that." He sat down his tea. "That boy trembles when she walks into a room. He and the Grey boy haven't unseen something. That girl avoids Eris like the plague. The Inquistorship is eyeing her for a position, that won't help soften her touch. I can tell you that she eats it up, their fear. I saw Lance nearly fall over his own damn feet trying to move out of her way. He's almost 30 and fears the girl she was at 15... now she's a grown woman with abilities far beyond those days. Your boy is handsome but that is all he has going for him."

"Are you going to allow her to be with a Grey?"

"Why do you assume she's ready to move on from her last partner?"

"I'm not, I'm just saying she didn't have trouble mourning Theodosia's death from the looks of her behavior."

"Watch yourself, Maggie. We all mourn differently." His tone for a moment was grave in its warning. He then returned to his more cheerful tone. " It was just a secret meeting with three

stoners...What do you think they cooked up? " Augustine narrowed his eyes. "Gods, you're starting to sound like Markus about his son. He's afraid the boy hates his own shadow. So he's resorting to the same tactics. The answer is no. Eris will make her own choices, regardless, of how it affects my House. Shame on you both."

"There's going to be a mission, suppose." She began to suggest.

" I suppose Eris will be there but I suppose nothing else. If your boy were to improve his standing it would be with her on a mission. But good luck, if she even notices."

Maggie let out a disgusted sound before returning to her tea. Infuriated she pressed on. "How can you be so cavalier during all this? We're growing weaker, we have smaller houses. If we don't focus on banning together we could be erased as relics while the real relics are taking control and sending us backward. What beacon of light are we from the shadows if our own kind swallows us whole?" She hissed.

Augustine snapped " Do you think my concerns aren't yours? Not long ago, I was forbidden from having a family, only to have it robbed from me. Now I'm rebuilding what should have already been wrought. I know that we can be extinguished but that is why we have to be stronger than their numbers. We need not be a beacon of light, We need to survive and thrive first. Then we can truly help humanity. Light and Shadow are boxing us in. I saw Markus and Cardinal sharing a walk. They were Knighted together so, of course, he's going to be soft on them and Cardinal on him. They've already begun to mobilize their own groups together."

"They wash and cover the other's hands..."Maggie spoke gravely "We can be scorched and swallowed if we're out of line...We only have--"

"We have might and might alone. Together we'll not be challenged. The Knighting Ceremony will confirm that. A lot can happen in two years.



