

Eventually he found a way to trick me into his games. He caught me in a moment of weakness and took advantage of it. But first I must tell you something about what I felt for Damian's victims.

I was afraid of them. They were living and walking death. Death that made noises, laughed, made toasts with expensive wines from Damian's cellar, doing whatever Damian wanted them to do. They were an everlasting reminder: Look, this is what awaits you.

I never tried to approach any of them. They were his and they were condemned.... I always fall in love so easily. I was falling in love with trees, stars and clouds. I was falling in love with books. With the little melodies Damian's fingers dragged out of the piano. He was breaking my heart saying: This is Christopher's composition. Once we played this together. Come and sit with me, he said. Let's try it together.

I was falling in love with dead things, because everything that was alive died and I was doomed to suffer. I did not want to suffer. I did not want to feel.

I was calling them 'the things', those doomed, mortal lovers of his. The things. Things that had nothing to do with me, that can't feel and did not seek compassion. Things that you could ruin and never think about twice. Things to possess and do whatever you want with. Things that can't say thank you, or I love you, because they are things, dumb and deaf. Things.

But because I was afraid of them, I hated them. I hated them because they were things. So weak and fragile and dumb. Those feelings unfolded in me unknown cruelty. I wanted to hurt them, to prove that they were things or to prove to myself that I was not one of them and that I have power over them. I knew I could do whatever I wanted. Damian wouldn't mind. Damian would be... *on my side*? Oh, Damian was always on my side, feeding my little wickedness, and the merciless ideas of my little mind, which had already developed considerably, and had become a sophisticated criminal mind, you know? Damian thought this was amusing.

But nevertheless I did not hurt anyone. At least not in the beginning.

But then I started to watch them. With yearning. They were like soap bubbles glistening with the light that danced on their surface. They were so close, only to be gone in the next moment. Like flocks of angels fluttering through old attics. Flighty like shadows of ghosts. I was trying to reach for them to stop them, but they would disappear every time. Oh, how much I wanted to touch them! But it was like I lived in

one world and they in another. I needed some link to bridge our worlds. And, I guess, most of all...

I was so terribly alone.

It happened in the oval salon, where anybody rarely lingers. It was beautiful. It looked like some castle-cathedral, with a mosaic stone floor, with an ornament in the middle. The walls and the dome were painted with scenes from Greek mythology. In cavities' in the ornate pink, yellow and blue walls stood four white marble statues of Apollo, Aphrodite, Athena and Hades. Between each one of them was a massive door of ornamented walnut wood.

The salon ended with a strong crest and dome. In the high of the first floor there were balconies, and on the one of them, that night, I turned up to be.

I don't really remember why I was there. The balconies could be approached from the first floor. They had white marble fences and were closed from the rest of the house with green velvet curtains. I pulled the curtains and entered.

He stood there, turning around just like he was standing in an empty cathedral, staring at the statues of the saints. He could not see me; I was standing in the shadow. But I saw him so clearly. I had that feeling... Like I was the hunter prowling on his prey, watching it, knowing that it couldn't see or hear him, and so he loiters for a second to relish in the moment, to embalm it in his memory. To save it for later, when he would remember the power he had over his prey.

He was young, maybe my age, maybe younger, I could not really tell. I cannot even remember his face. I know that he had long, blond hair, colored, it seemed. His eyes were brown. That is all I can remember. And as I try to recollect how his kisses felt it is something I have a hard time remembering. Like it happened to someone else, and not on account of me, and that lover was just an image I dreamed in some feverish dream. Unreal.

The first thing I noticed and surprised me was that he was wearing Damian's clothes. But he did not really look like Damian, although they were the same height and were similarly built. He was like someone who had put on a costume for a show, in which he would play the role of some mythological hero.

I watched him for a long time. He walked around the auditorium, gazing at the painted scenes, coming closer and then pulling back, touching the sandal clad feet of the god statues, looking up toward their stone faces like they were miraculous healing

statues. I watched him almost bewitch, like a spider, crouched at the corner of its net, watching the fly struggling and twitching and dangling in the silky threads. As I watched him, hidden in the shadow, leaning with my hands on the fence, I felt so lightheaded that in the end it seemed to me that the gallery was moving and trembling, and me along with it. There was some familiar and intimate flavor in the air...

*“Quid iuvat aspectus, si non conceditur usus.”*

His whisper was tenderer than the flutter of butterfly wings. I felt his breath on my nape and quickly I closed my eyes. For a moment I thought these were the words of some prayer, but then, like through a mist, their meaning touched my mind. I smiled and opened my eyes. Down there, the young man didn't see us. I turned around.

“Oh? And what is that you are suggesting?” I whispered as gently as he did, just with my breath. He was watching my lips move slowly. His eyes were so sharp and hungry. On his cheek and forehead his veins became visible under his porcelain skin. I raised my head and softly touched those blue marks. He sighed and until then I didn't think he was breathing. I did not understand the pathways of his pain.

I stepped back, but at the same moment he grabbed me and pulled me closer to him. This closeness was at the same time terrible, as much as it was good. He looked at my lips and my face like he was seeing me for the first time, but he avoided my eyes. He began to scare me. Under half-opened lips his white teeth flashed. I could almost imagine those fangs. I could almost imagine them on my skin.

“Take him,” he whispered and then pulled me even closer to him so I was standing on the tips of my toes, uselessly trying to pull away. His lips were so close that they almost touched me. And his breath, flavorless and unnatural, like the breath of the marble statues in the salon under us, disturbed me more than his touch. His predatory eyes looked like they could see every drop of blood that flowed through my body. They sought it with every flash. His fingers on my arms burned my skin. Dangerous. Dangerous. Dangerous.

“He's yours...” I didn't hear the sound. Only his lips moved. The dark crowns of his long lashes trembled. His grip weakened a little. I dared to inhale.

His eyes slowly closed. Horror was screaming through my veins like they were not part of my body. My lips moved and my voice, strange and shaky, whispered:

“You're giving him to me? Him, who you yourself want so much?”

A spasm disfigured his face, his smile tensed on his lips. But he did not open his eyes.

“Yes... I do...”

Against my will, the sound of his voice made me shiver. So terrible, wild and implacable was his desire.

Some kind of murmur, like when a cat purrs, passed his lips. He let his head fall forward, his silken hair touched my cheek, so soft and cold that I wished I could run my fingers in it, feeling its fullness. His lips fell on my cheek.

He was whispering fast and feverish. I could not understand the words. He was whispering words in Latin like prayers, like songs and like sweet curses. His hands went up on my shoulders. I was trying to free myself from his grip.

“Damian?”

His fingers wrapped themselves in my hair. His hand was cold and unnatural. Hand of death.

“Damian!”

It seemed to me like he was giving in to some inner insatiable instinct that did not care for rules or laws, because it knew nothing of them. That was what he looked like when his head hastily, but somehow lifelessly, fell down toward my neck, and his fingers pulled my high collar that was covering it.

“Damian!” I screamed. The young man down there looked toward us. The sound of my voice echoed and glided off the walls of the round auditorium. The sound of the footsteps. The door opening... closing...

I was wrestling with him, this strange white statue. I screamed again:

“Damian! Let me go! It’s me. Don’t...”

His arms let me go so suddenly that I lost my balance, lurched and ran into the balcony wall. My eyes were wide open in horror, my face pale, and my breathing jerky. I leaned on the wall, not daring to move. He suddenly turned his back on me, leaned his palms on the wall and hid his face in his upper-arms.

We stood like that for what seemed like eternity. The seconds were oozing like blood drops from an open wound. Pain was hungry. It existed from the beginning of the world, and it’ll exist when there won’t be one. There’s no a cure for it. There’s no nourishment that could satisfy it.

His hand moved, but he was still bent over, covering his face. His fingers reached for the green velvet curtains and slowly push them aside. Light flew in.

“I know it’s you...” his whisper was shivering in the waves of restrained passion. His fingers, so white, crumpled the velvet and the color between them looked poisonous. “Go now,” he said and leaned his forehead on the cold wall, like he was a mortal and his forehead was burning and he wished to cool it down with that everlasting cold stone. “Go. He’s been waiting. Take him like he’s...” his voice broke, the curtain slipped from his fingers and his hand made a motion. “Go, little sister.”

For a few seconds I was not able to move. I was staring at his crooked back. His hair fell down, covering his face, but it uncovered his neck and the vein at the side, terribly blue and pulsating. This was not right, I thought. This was not how it was supposed to be. This was not happening.

I tore myself from the wall, made one step, two, and then looked at him. His left arm was hanging like it was dead beside him. He wasn’t moving. It seemed like he wasn’t even breathing.

I pushed the curtains aside and stepped out.