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## An Exploration of the Psyche in "Era of Black"

Haley M. Karabasz

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE PSYCHE IN  
"ERA OF BLACK"

Haley M. Karabasz

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

AN EXPLORATION OF THE PSYCHE IN "ERA OF BLACK"

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE

HONORS COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ENGLISH

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCES

BY

HALEY M. KARABASZ

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I propose three parallel projects. The first is an introductory exploration of the narrative conventions that have become, over time, established tropes in Fantasy Fiction as a brief discussion of my conscious strategy to expect the narrative structure set by modern fantasy literature in my own fiction project. The second and third projects have to do with the progress, in which I deploy specific narrative techniques that reach beyond the received "rules" of the Fantasy mode. The third and final project has to do with an analysis of my protagonist's complex psychological decay, one that both acknowledges and reaches beyond the traditional arc of fictional heroic journeys.

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The three psychological situations that add to her psychological decay are as follows: 1) Her relationship with her physically and psychologically abusive father, 2) her relationship with her psychologically abusive mother who contributes to Noire's emotional devastation and 3) her relationship with her sister, the only positive relationship she has, traces her emotional decay. Noire's poor coping skills, the abuse from her parents, and her relationship with her sister all contribute to her psychological decay and ultimately her death. This thesis explores the literature in a non-traditional fashion for traditional Fantasy literature.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABSTRACT

I would like to acknowledge my family for their support as I both wrote my novel and my Senior Thesis, my friends for getting me involved with the writing at a young age, and my sisters, Laura and Kasey, for encouraging me when it felt better to just give up rather than keep writing as well as my Senior Thesis Director, Prof. Carey Scott Walker for helping me and encouraging me to continue writing.

In this thesis, I propose three parallel projects. The first is an introductory exploration of the narrative conventions that have become, over time, established tropes in Fantasy Fiction as a brief discussion of my conscious strategy to reject the normative structures set in modern fantasy literature in my own fiction project "Era of Black." Second is an excerpt from my novel-in-progress, in which I deploy specific stylistic and narrative gestures that mark my effort to move beyond the received "rules" of the Fantasy mode. The third and final project here is to frame an analysis of my protagonist's complex psychological decay, one that both acknowledges and reaches beyond the traditional arc of fictional heroic-isms.

The three psychological situations that add to her psychological decay are as follows: 1) Her relationship with her physically and psychologically abusive father, 2) her relationship with her psychologically abusive mother who contributes to Noire's emotional deprivation and 3) her relationship with her sister, the only positive relationship she has within her immediate family. Noire's poor coping skills, the abuse from her parents, and her relationship with her sister all contribute to her psychological decay and ultimately her decline into the trope of the fallen hero in a non-traditional fashion for traditional Fantasy literature.

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none of which is relatable to the average reader. Fantasy has the potential to be both relatable as well as believable even without the convenience of suspension of disbelief, however, because fantasy writers are continuously using the same tropes creating a stagnant genre. Writers of the Fantasy genre have trapped themselves in the hero's journey format, with the damsel in distress, with the 3D villain, and with the chosen hero and weapon as well as many other tropes I will not address at this present moment to name (Thomas, Garcia 13-16, Bright 159-164).

The Hero's Journey—perhaps the most fully recognized and traditionally received of the four tropes—is also potentially the most problematic. The reason is simple enough: every story must have a protagonist and a central conflict. The hero's journey begins with the Hero's home that has always been or is under threat by a dark force/villain. The Hero has no reason to do anything about it until a key plot point takes place for example, the Hero loses his stability in some way and is compelled by force or circumstances to go on the journey. For example, in Star Wars, Luke's aunt and uncle are murdered by the Empire setting his journey in motion. Next, the Hero meets his/her mentor, their Yoda, to train against a looming evil and typically joins with what is called the "5 man band" (Bright 94-95): The Leader, the Lancer, the big guy, the smart guy, and the brat, to go and destroy the villain while the villain has sent increasingly stronger minions to

## INTRODUCTION

My purpose in writing the novel *Era of Black* is both to create a compelling fantasy tale and yet, at the same time, challenge the reader with a narrative that moves deliberately beyond the conventions of the genre itself. In this introduction, I will discuss the major tropes of the fantasy genre, all immediately recognizable to most the casual reader: 2D Villains, Damsel in Distress, The Chosen One's Weapon, and The Hero's Journey Format. Nowadays, fantastical writing rarely strays from the tropes presented at the beginning for example epics like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odysseus*. Even heroes in more writing have no flaws, fantastical strength, and an epic journey none of which is relatable to the average reader. Fantasy has the potential to be both relatable as well as believable even without the convenience of suspension of disbelief, however, because fantasy writers are continuously using the same tropes creating a stagnant genre. Writers of the Fantasy genre have trapped themselves in the hero's journey format, with the damsel in distress, with the 2D villain, and with the chosen hero and weapon as well as many other tropes I will not address at this present moment in time (Thomas, Garcia 13-16, Bright 159-164).

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kill the heroes off but never succeeds. In reality, the weak minions only strengthen the team going to destroy the villain. Then, the Chosen One/Hero cannot defeat said villain without the chosen one's weapon, or the Excalibur Effect, so with the help of his/her friends they go to retrieve the Chosen One's weapon.

The fight against the villain will then ensue. The Hero and his compatriots will appear to have failed in their shared task of defeating their common enemy. But through an empowering intervention of sacred or inspiration language, usually in the form of a speech delivered among the , the Heart -- typically a female and the female that played the role of Damsel of Distress at first -- reaffirms the heroic motif of a righteous struggle. Only then is Hero able to destroy the Villain which restores the stability of the kingdom is restored. However, the hero either melds back into society, or fails to do so, or goes off for more adventure, or becomes a recluse somewhere. Not many people have the experience of saving the world and do not understand the Hero. The experience of the adventure alienates him/her from reentering society happily.

The Damsel in distress trope is typically but not always what sends the hero off on the journey. This trope forces the Hero to take action but does not necessarily give him a true reason to save the universe/world/kingdom etc. If not being used as the key plot turn, the Damsel in distress typically comes in the middle of the story to be the hero's token love interest. She typically is flat as a character, being nothing but pure and good, as well as attractive. In modern takes, she becomes spunky and hot-headed but that creates a flat character in its own right; her character becomes nothing but spunky and hot-headed.

One of most recognizable tropes is the magical weapon that only the Chosen One/Hero can use. It always is the only weapon that can destroy the villain. This suggests that all heroes are predestined by some unseen force when in reality anyone could be a hero in the right circumstances. Usually, this is the reason as to why the Hero's friends cannot aide him in the final

battle, because their attacks render useless without the magic weapon. They typically spend the final fight scene battling the Villain's minions.

My least favorite of the tropes is the 2D villain. The main villain is evil because he's evil: villains are usually 2D in fantasy writing and they are only evil without any true motivation. The Villain wants to destroy the world or rule the world because they can, which is rather unconvincing. People typically have a deeper motivation. Let the Villain want to rule because of an inferiority complex, desiring to rule over those who oppressed him to convince himself of his own worth. Let them wish to destroy the world because they feel humanity is innately evil and in order to save the world they have to destroy their own race. The reason should be believable. A villain without purpose is uninteresting as is a hero who has no motivation to fight other than for the fact he is the Chosen One and it is expected of him.

My issue with these tropes is not just because they are overused but because they are lazy. Is the Hero stagnant where he is? Make him go on a journey for the only magical weapon that can destroy the villain. The villain is too easy to destroy? Make the Hero's/Chosen One's weapon. Hero needs to do something heroic? Damsel in distress. Readers dislike the demure female? Make her spunky and hot-headed. It feels like there is no real thought process behind it. My inspiration mostly doesn't come from what I've seen in fantasy writing but from I wish I had seen in fantasy writing. "Era of Black" is an attempt to re-imagine these received tropes as expressive motifs for a new kind of Hero's Journey, one that treats narrative convention as a opportunity to stage patterns of theme and variation. Moreover, my project implies a kind of responsibility to preserve the integrity of normative Fantasy tropes by contemplating the possibility of more complex structures. In some sense, therefore, my novel is necessarily a restatement of the very narrative it presumes to erase. But that tension is a source of reinvention that permits us to see over the

narrowing horizon of Fantasy Fiction and search for signs of renewal and inspire the creation of Fantasy writing far beyond the bounds of the constraints that have held the genre for far too long.

Princess Noire's family legacy is that of destruction and domination of other nations and few still stand strong enough to keep her father's Kingdom of Prandises from conquering their lands. Noire, set to be the next ruler if she bests her sister in magical prowess, instead makes a deal with King Colbert, her abusive father. Attracted by both his power, her desire to rule, as well as protect her family drives her to make a Sorcerer's Seal, a magical agreement in which if one fails their end of the bargain, the Seal ends you. Her side of the bargain is simple. She will become the next ruler and he must leave her mother and sister alone. His side of the bargain traps her into 8 years of obeying without question. This is a story of those eight years and the horror that follows after she shakes his hand.

## SYNOPSIS

Princess Noire's family legacy is that of destruction and domination of other nations and few still stand strong enough to keep her father's Kingdom of Friandises from conquering their lands. Noire, set to be the next ruler if she bests her sister in magical prowess, instead makes a deal with King Colbert, her abusive father. Attracted by both his power, her desire to rule, as well as protect her family drives her to make a Sorcerer's Seal, a magical agreement in which if one fails their end of the bargain, the Seal ends you. Her side of the bargain is simple. She will become the next ruler and he must leave her mother and sister alone. His side of the bargain traps her into 8 years of obeying without question. This is a story of those eight years and the horror that follows after she shakes his hand.

## Era of Black Excerpts

### Prologue

Long ago, in nothing but the night sky, the Mother Star, Ast, in her loneliness, kissed specks of her own dust to create millions of shining stars, but to no avail: her loneliness was not cured. For each stationary star she said hello to would not reply...

In her misery, she could not help but shed 10 tears. They brought to life the eleven Runes Sound, Sweetness, Electricity, Earth, Metal, Air, Fire, Dark, and Light. The last tear split creating both Ice and Water.

Ast rejoiced as her children came to her and all was well... for a time. Her children, though surrounded by her love and each other's love, grew as lonely as she had been before their arrival. Her love drove her to sacrifice herself, blazing and slamming into a voiceless star, creating our world of Evalon, and the people who would inhabit it.

Tsil, the Rune of Ice, the only survivor of the tragedies that would follow, collected their souls and her own and released them on Evalon's winds from Aightries spirit to save the balance of the elements. The Runes would impart their powers on Tsil's chosen children of earth, separating humans into groups of Rune users, now called Runes after their deceased Gods, and non-rune users, Evalonians. Tsil chose the strongest of the species to claim that power and to rule over the metaphorical sheep.

And this is like every great oppression story religion comes up with: those chosen by "Gods" and those who are not. I remember my thoughts on our teachings were interrupted by my sister's gleeful laughter.

I watched as Goldie frolicked, her fur changing from yellow to gold in the bright sun through the courtyard to cover my sister, Blanche, in sticky, wet, dog kisses. Blanche giggled and patted the ball of fur with an earthquake for a tail. My mother was under a parasol held by a

servant, keeping the hot midday sun off her face. She was sipping tea with mint leaves nestled at the bottom, watching Blanche with a smile, as was I. Blanche was always smiling but my last memory of her would not be her smile. I remember the heat, suffocating, as was our duty for one of us to become the next ruler of my father's kingdom.

Blanche was two years my junior, still young and innocent. My mother was a princess from the Kingdom of Taikiyama by the name Akane, meaning dark red and dark red blood was spilled in order for my father to have her; my father had a way with getting what he wanted. She was beautiful and kind, if not to me. She was an untouched pearl in our garden of evil, a product of the ocean forced on land where she didn't belong.

She would be an important outside force who would be the mentor of my sister, Blanche, and I, unfortunately, by my father. King Colbert and Queen Akane, of the noble House of Meringue. I never realized the knots of this story until I decided to look back at my memories. It's easy to see the bits and pieces when you look behind, but hard to gather when entangled in the moment.

It would be decided by my father which of us would be the next ruler in the Kingdom of Friandises. Neither of us were aware on how he would judge us worthy, nor in this scene were we old enough to care. That day we were to be trained in the ways of magic.

A new age was coming, an age that would be my rule. The name given by my mother's side in the Kingdom of Taikiyama: my Era, Kuro no Jidai, The Era of Black. I would rule it with Umbaresh's Halberd sealed to my hand.

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## Chapter 1

That scene would repeat, and not for the last time. Again, I watched as Goldie frolicked, her fur changing from yellow to gold in the bright sun, through the courtyard to cover my sister,

Blanche, in sticky, wet, dog kisses. Blanche would still giggle and pet the ball of fur with an earthquake for a tail, but she was older now, as was I, if not by much. Again, my mother was under a parasol held by a servant, keeping the hot midday sun off her face. She would sip her tea with mint leaves nestled at the bottom, watching Blanche with a smile. She would never do the same for me.

"Noire. Blanche," I looked up to the sound of my name, and saw my father standing there. I saw my mother look over in my peripheral vision. I did not even have to look at her to feel her uneasiness, and my own.

"It is time to be learned in the ways of magic. Without magic, you are without power. Without power, you are weak, and if you are weak you will have no way to defend what is rightfully yours," He gestured to the wide, stretched out land, "Your kingdom."

He continued after looking at the wall that guards us from the outside world. "The Runes chose us to be the rulers of this land. It is your divine right to rule that gives you the ability to use magic, and it is your divine duty to devote yourself to that power."

He glided over to us, and pulled Blanche up. He sneered softly at her soiled garments, and clapped for a servant to wipe the dirt from her clothes. I watched as my mother stood up, stiffly, like a doll, my father's doll, but she was clever, I will give her that. She pressed lightly against my father's side and whispered something in his ear. His eyes flashed at first in anger but then softened, and then cleared his throat, "There will be a change of plans. Noire, you will come with me. Blanche, you will be trained by your mother."

My father gestured for her to follow Queen Meringue, and I was left with the tyrant. If a King is so adored by his people, there will be a watch over the castle walls only for outside invaders. But spikes and charms guarded our fortress of a home, and no one was to come in but those who the King sent in. There was no courtyard for the peasants to flood and make market in

the spring, summer, or autumn, and there was no sharing of firewood in the winter like in my mother's Kingdom of Taikiyama. But youth and naiveté seemed to court each other and I was both. I got up from the chair I was resting in and curtsied before my father in respect. He grunted in approval and we made our way down through the closed off courtyard to the giant ballroom. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling, poised like spiders, slowly slipping down their silver gossamers, immobile and half in flight.

"We begin." I changed my focus to my father, then to the scuttling image of Orthellia, father's Fire Sage, and the other Sages trotting to keep up. I was surprised at how quickly the choosing of my element was presented.

The Sages placed a bowl of water, a burning candle and a bowl of soil before me. I knew what element my father wanted me to choose, and I was inclined toward fire for that reason. He found it the superior element of the four. He would not waste time teaching me to be a sugar witch, sound witch or the like, only the elements that would almost always be accessible and always be incredibly destructive.

I knew I still had to 'choose'. I gazed into the bowl of water, and saw my face, blank other than my eyes; they were both shivering in excitement and shuddering in fear. I dipped two fingers into the cool pool laid before me. Water brought so much life, it was calming and used mostly for healing. This was the one element I knew I could not choose unless I wanted to regret it forever, so I pushed the bowl away, and placed my hand gently over the cool touch of the earth. Earthquakes, crystals, powerful, beautiful... Collected, steady... I felt cool electricity run through my body, sending a soft tremor through me but I ignored it and waited. The Aero Sage, Platnios blew a soft breeze over me... Tornados... destruction... Probably would be my father's second choice. I placed my hand over the candle. I knew I would not be good at fire magic. There was not enough rage in me and I was not interested in destroying anything, but I knew I may have to one day in order to



protect my Kingdom. I motioned to take away the water and at the Aero Sage that neither would be my choices.

I gazed up at my father. I could tell he had seen the shudder, he knew my preference of element. If I chose fire, he would be my teacher, and that was something I wouldn't willingly choose. I could handle the punishment for the one blunder of choosing the wrong element, but I knew any teacher he gave me would not punish me as harshly as he would if I did not get the spells correct the first time. I blew out the candle and made my choice, "I will be a Mage of Earth." I waited for my father's face to change from peach to crimson, but the change did not occur. Instead, a small smile played on his lips. Maybe I had made the right choice according to him, and that's what made my stomach drop.

I watched my father motion for Timberone, his Earth Sage, to step forward. He made me uneasy though he was clearly attractive. Soft brown eyes and wild dark hair, well built with a strong jaw.

He gave a half smirk as he bowed to me, as though he was mocking me and my royal lineage. I glared only in my mind. "Seems we'll be working together, Noire," He always spoke smoothly, as though he was perpetually wooing some unseen female. "I look forward to our first lesson." With that, he turned and sunk back to the shadows from whence he came, and where I wished he's stay.

My father turned to me nonchalantly, and said, "Come, let us see what your sister has chosen."

We walked to the closed off courtyard and crossed into the garden, my sister had apparently learned a spell already and her element was obvious... water. She flounced and watered another red rose with the flick of a juniper rod. The stream was weak, but this did not

matter to sweet Blanche. I felt my heart thump in fear. I had learned nothing and had not been gone that long.

I watched my mother turn to look at my father and saw her smile at Blanche turn into sheer terror. My father grabbed my mother by the wrist and he snarled, "Why in Umbaresh's name would you let Blanche chose such a weak element!?" I smelled burning flesh, and saw steam rise from my mother's wrist and immediately closed my eyes. I heard my mother's voice crack as she replied, "Water can be powerful! With enough practice she can destroy a living being where it stands. All are made of mostly water! She can bend their bodies to her will!"

I felt my father's heat subside... "An interesting perspective... and you can teach her all this, yes?" My father queried. My mother gave an affirmative nod. "Then proceed."

My father then turned to me with a cheerful smile, "Noire. Your first lesson will be early tomorrow, be sure to get enough rest." Then he walked coolly off back to the ballroom.

I turned to my mother. She was cradling her burned hand, and called for water. Blanche brought over her bowl of water that she had been manipulating to water the flowers, and said, "Here mommy, to make you better..." with a look that nearly broke my heart.

I stood dumbly, unsure of what to do. I watched as my mother used her unburned hand to soothe her burnt flesh, chanting softly. I awkwardly walked over to my mother and placed my hand softly on her back and patted shyly. She turned and glared at me, more fire in her eyes than my father could wield. Startled by her response, I shied my hand away, stopped to watch a moment, then slipped quietly back to my room.

I walked a bit heavy into my room, and looked at the blank stone walls. A wooden rocking horse stood in the corner. I stroked the woven chocolate-colored yarn mane softly, and then emotion overtook me. I placed a hand on the rock wall, and felt my body shake and wetness leak from my eyes. A flash of rage overwhelmed me and I slammed the door then knocked a pile

of books off my dresser to the floor, and screamed to the empty room, "I'm not! I'm not!" Unsure of what I wasn't. My hands clenched and brow furrowed in rage, but it quickly passed, and my body released the tension.

I bent to pick up the books rather than call a servant, and stopped in mid-pick-up, and stayed squatted for a moment, then moved back up, books in hand and placed them back on the dresser. I looked out my window, then flopped on my bed. The sun was about to say goodnight. Perhaps, I should try and sleep. Not much else to do, at least until tomorrow. I paused a moment then glanced lazily to a silver bell, sighed softly, then batted at it, and a joyful jingle resounded in the room. I smiled as a servant rushed in. "Yes, Princess Noire?"

"Chamomile tea, three lumps of sugar, please."

"Yes, Princess Noire." I watched as he slipped out, then I watched the sun disappear behind Mt. Taiki, far away in my mother's Kingdom. Safe from conquering only by marriage, yet still a slave to father's country. The servant returned and gave a slight bow as he handed the tea to me, and I gave a soft thank you but he was gone before he even heard it. I sipped my tea slowly, then placed the mug on my bedside table. I watched as the sky gradually turned dark, as did my consciousness and I drifted slowly to sleep with only the company of the heavenly bodies that lit up the night.

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## Chapter 2

I watched as Blanche played with Goldie in the garden. Again, it was the same scene of my mother and her parasol and the tea with mint leaves, and I watching from afar. I brought out my oaken wand, and magically etched into the dirt, my name. Noire. What a name... Black.

I looked up to see Blanche crying, and from what I could gather Goldie had knocked her down and she had scratched herself up pretty badly in the white roses' thorns. I ran over to her to

help her up out of the bush, and asked if she was okay. She wiped away a tear, and blubbered out a yes, I gave her a hug, and said, "How about I get you some tea? Anything but mint, right?" I smirked, and stuck out my tongue. She laughed and nodded, "Anything but yucky mint," and then stuck her tongue back out at me. I raced to the kitchen and brewed the tea myself. If I left it to the servants it would be too strong.

I chose a dark, rich black tea, Assam, and waited for it to steep, then disposed of the leaves, and added four sugar lumps to her cup. Blanche preferred hers sickly sweet. I carefully carried the cup back to the garden... I heard some sort of commotion going on out there and carried it there a little less carefully, spilling some of the tea on me.

I raced to the garden to see my father screaming in rage at Blanche; she was crying and screaming, "No!" My mother screamed something unintelligible and tried to get between my father and Blanche, but my father, red-faced, backhanded her out of the way.

"Kill it, Blanche. It hurt you and you should end it. To falter is weakness, and you will have to hurt both your enemies and friends who question your authority in order to have true control over the Kingdom!" He gestured to Goldie, the poor thing, huddled to the ground, her loyalty to Blanche keeping her from fleeing. Blanche screamed at him half in terror and half in anger, "Goldie didn't mean to! It was just an accident! I won't kill her, she's my friend, and you can't make me!" Tears streamed down her face as well as highlighted her rage. I watched my father raise his hand towards Blanche. I whipped out my wand and raised a weak, soil wall in front of Blanche. It withstood the attack as long as it needed to, protecting her from the flames. My father's eyes pierced into me and I could read his eyes. I was a dead girl.

I flicked a sharp, rock-like blade into the canine, killing her instantly and humanely. I pretended to brush away a strand of hair rather than let my regret meet my father's eyes, and turned to my father. "It is ended. No threat remains."

My father's rage vanished to nothing and he gave me a smile. "This is a true leader, Blanche. You can learn a great deal from your sister. She destroyed the threat as soon as she entered the courtyard without even knowing the situation." I knew right then and there I had not destroyed the real threat. It stood before me giving me praise. Is this what a leader was? Killing those who didn't really mean any harm. I felt fury boil inside me but it would not spill out from underneath me.

I watched my mother cradle my sister and glare at me as she walked away with Blanche... I vaguely heard my father tell me to stay late after dinner to speak with him, I nodded that I had heard and walked like a clockwork's gears to my room, by habit, void of emotions. I placed a hand on the wall... a murderer... I am a killer...

My mother... her glare... What did she... think...? That I wanted to kill Goldie?! I did it to save Blanche! And myself... was I supposed to have died after saving Blanche... Had I done the right thing? I was a half-hearted hero... Could save Blanche and myself but not the dog, that makes me a monster! I laughed out loud, then covered my mouth in horror, then thudded on my bed, hands clutching the comforter. Dead on the inside, I sat there. No thoughts passed, no emotion, just stillness.

Eventually, a servant collected me for dinner, and even the candles' small flickers relieved none of the darkness penetrating that room. Blanche only glanced at me once and it was unsure, whether to hate me, forgive me, thank me... and I did not know which one I deserved. My mother would not look at me. My father seemed unaware of the tense situation, and like every meal, we ate in silence.

When we were done, the servants cleared our places, and my mother rushed Blanche away from me, purposely avoiding my gaze, and my heart committed suicide. I started to return to my

room, when my father called me closer. I reluctantly came over, and sat down. My father was proud of me, and I didn't like how it felt.

"Blanche is weak, Noire, but I still have hope she will become stronger, but you have far surpassed my expectations. If you keep it up, you will get the throne." So the contest would still be on. There would be more pain, more tears, for my mother, and sweet Blanche.

"No," I said, before I even thought. My father looked at me, eyebrow raised in question.

"Blanche is weak and always will be weaker. Give up on her. Blanche will never be strong in the way you desire." The words came out smoothly but my heart was pounding in my chest; I hoped my terror would not move my face.

My father sat back in the chair, and crossed his arms in thought. It was quiet for what seemed like an eternity. Then he spoke, "I think you may be right, Noire. Your sister has always been soft." I felt myself sigh in relief on the inside until he continued, "You will have the throne, Noire, but on one condition."

"Me?" I replied, playing with the idea.

"Yes, but you will be bound to a Sorcerer's Seal." He shifted his weight, his eyes glinting black. My blood ran cold. If you failed to do your end of the bargain, the seal ended you, permanently. I took in a silent deep breath, "What are the terms?"

"Blanche will no longer be in line for the throne. I will teach you a secret magic that has kept me in power for so long. You will have the Kingdom when I die, but you will do my bidding and obey me for eight years without question. Do you understand?" I sat back in my seat.

Eight years of never questioning, and power and saving Blanche and my mother, or more pain and suffering for my mother, Blanche and I. At least this way I would only suffer, but I knew my heart was not completely in the right place. I wanted the throne; I wanted power. No one matched my father in power. He did not even have to use a wand. He could conjure magic out of

thin air; he did not need available fire for bigger spells. Could he teach me these same things? Also, if I faltered now, would he see it as weakness and kill me on the spot? Would he realize I had at first been trying to protect Blanche rather than get her out of the way? Eight years of unquestionable service, but also eight years of questionable acts.

"Well?" He replied. I paused before giving him my answer.

"I'm not so sure..." I briefly hesitated, I could see in his eyes that if I was about to disagree, I would be dead. I continued, "That I like those terms." His eyes flickered for a moment then he motioned for me to continue.

"Mother could have another heir, then this deal does me no good. Here's the deal." I was shaking on the inside but my voice did not waver and came out powerfully, almost as evil as Umbaresh's form before me. "You cannot force me into another Sorcerer's Seal. You cannot kill me, harm me, or use magic or blade to kill or harm Mother or Blanche. You cannot harm my mother and Blanche and any child born from Mother's womb. I don't want you to touch them or use any magic on them benign or malicious. In fact, I don't want you to even talk to Blanche, and finally, I will have the throne."

He laughed and it made me feel sick inside, "Well done, however, you are still soft, Noire. I will cure you of it. I agree to these terms. Shall we?" He reached out his hand but his eyes stared through me into the future I did not know. I knew even then this was a bad idea, but instead of dying and refusing, self-preservation got the best of me. At least this way I could protect the rest of my family from him. I grasped his hand firmly, to fake my certainty. A dark energy laced across our arms: it felt as though it was eating my essence... I felt my body weaken... the criss-crossing of black shadows tattooed on my arm, then it faded, sinking into my flesh.

I missed a chair gaudy with gold, and hit the floor, dizzy from the experience, however my father seemed unaffected. "You will not harm nor kill me by blade or magic, and you will not

kill yourself," he told me coldly. I was startled by the second command, why would it matter and what had I done? A cold feeling sunk into the pit of my stomach... As his eyes grinned down at me as twisted as wrought iron, "Lessons begin now, Noire."

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### Chapter 3

My body jolted awake, the sun would not smile upon the world until hours later. I had to study.

I rolled out of bed, my body sore, barely able to make it to my desk, my eyes watered, my body strained and complained, but after four tries, I was out of bed.

The match was lit and the fire flickered on the candle. I flipped open the book and whispered, "Nosferatu." and the words stenciled itself onto the page. I skimmed over the reading, wondering what awful thing I could do with this magic, and sighed softly. I had been taught to steal memories, to warp memories, to use memory for torture, cast illusions, to transfer my wounds to another's body, to paralyze and so many others. Not only were they horrific spells but they invaded another's privacy, but as long as I obeyed, I would live, as would Blanche and mother. My body was so exhausted, I couldn't comprehend what I was reading.

I looked to the poor caged songbird in my room; it had been sleeping. I reached in, paralyzing it but not hurting it, as I did not want to hurt it nor have it bite me, and transferred my sleep deprivation to it, stealing its full night of sleep. After the transfer the bird was too tired to make a fuss and fell back asleep. I, now fully rested, knew later I would need another creature to transfer energy to again once Father introduced a new subject. I turned back to the spell: Nosferatu. I read over the page. Nosferatu was used to steal another's magic, my eyes widened as I read. I could steal magical power, but what was the drawback...? I flipped the pages... Glossing over, looking for the disadvantages of the spell but none were present. Could it be... there was no



drawback? That you could freely steal power as much as you wanted... That was an enormous amount of power... Which could go to your head and destroy you from the inside... Power corrupts, and looking at my Father I could see that. Unfortunately, life did not work like a book and no one would come to fight my Father, and there was no hero to rescue me. I slammed the book shut, and whispered, "Six more years."

I thought of my Father, if only I could steal his power... That was still within the guidelines. I could only not harm him by blade or magic that doesn't mean I couldn't use any on him, but dark magic's limitation was that you had to be able to touch your victim and there was no way on Evalon I would ever get close enough to touch him, let alone have time to cast the spell. Not only that, but he had embedded his fire magic with dark magic. That's how he used fire magic with his hands. Even if I embedded my earth magic with dark, what good would it be? I couldn't hurt him with magic and one mistake would end with my death, and I wasn't ready to die. I sat back in my chair, my bottom in pain from sitting so long. Today, I would steal someone's life work of magic with the touch of my hand, my Father was into tactile learning.

I watched the sun come over the horizon; it was dazzling. Crimson and gold outlined Mt. Taiki and the birds were a little too excited about this new day brought forth, but I would have done anything to be there instead. A servant was walking towards me; I knew who it was by his footsteps. My mother's footsteps were timid, my Father's strong, and Blanche's seemed to skip across the stone, and his thumped against the stone. I raised my head to acknowledge I knew he was behind me.

"King Meringue will see you now for lessons." I nodded and moved my now healed body out of my chair and walked down to the ballroom, the same room I chose my element of earth, the same room I would practice earth magic with Timberone later in the afternoon. I forced the doors open with a flick of the wrist, taking advantage of what I had learned so far.

The first figure I saw was my Father, dressed in gaudy jewels and colors, as was his signature. The next figure was wide-eyed in fear, gagged and bound to a chair, obviously for me to practice what I had learned upon. She was the standard form of beauty for nobility, nothing like me: straight blonde hair, blue eyes, and starved. I could discern that she was a peasant, probably a farmer's daughter, soil was visible under her nails, and her dress was bland and matched the kind of colors associated to dirt. I could sense her fear and the dark magic inside me fed on it and craved for more, but I was not my Father. I gave her a soft, sad smile. Her eyes changed to fearful confusion.

"Noire," I turned my head to face my Father, "You have read the page on Nosferatu." He said it more like a command rather than a question. I nodded and he asked me to begin.

"First," I spoke, "I want her memories, so I can utilize all she knows." He did not move to stop me so I proceeded, I held my hand to her forehead, and whispered to her that I was sorry, then proclaimed, "Cache recolti!"

Memories flashed, her name was Lily and she was a peasant, her mother had died in childbirth with her, her father often came home drunk and had touched her in a way men should only touch their wives because of how she resembled her mother. Her best friend who she had fallen in love with had died in a fire saving her and only then did I see the burn marks on her legs. Her father had sold her to mine when her father had realized she had learned earth magic, and knew some spells I was not aware of, from a wizardess in town by the name of Geralidie. Geralidie taught her these spells so that Lily would not have to stand so long out in the sun while she tilled the earth as her no good father wasted money on whatever alcoholic poison he chose, and probably was wasting that money now on the same. I felt myself choke back tears internally but my face wouldn't move. My sympathy was luckily eaten by the black magic parasite that infested my body. No weakness reached my Father's eyes.

"Now Noire, Nosferatu." He commanded. The inside of me felt sick; I didn't want to take her power. My face did not move. I placed my hand on her forehead.

"Nosferatu." As soon as the words came from my mouth I knew the spell would not work.

I heard my father sigh impatiently, "Again, Noire."

"Nosferatu." Again, nothing happened. My emotions were too strong to take her magic, I didn't want to take it. She had worked hard for it, why should I get it for free? I saw my father take out a quill and piece of parchment and my eyes widened in fear.

"For motivation," He smiled. My stomach sunk, but my hatred spurred my stubborn nature. "Again, Noire." I glared at him, and his eyes laughed.

"Nosferatu." I failed on purpose, and as he drew a line on the parchment, I felt a cut along the top of my hand, the same length. I did not make a sound, but my hand was burning softly in pain.

"Again, Noire." He said rigidly.

"Nosferatu." And again, I failed on purpose, and as he drew another line a matching burning cut appeared on my hand. Hatred burned in my heart, I refused to lose. The words repeated over and over and over again. "Again, Noire." "Nosferatu." "Again, Noire." "Nosferatu."

The lines of red laced my arms, tears streaming uncontrollably down my face from pain.

"My patience has worn thin, Noire," he raised his hands and gathered vapor from the air and salt from the earth and combined the two, and dowsed my body in the saline water. I shuddered violently in pain and cried harder. I couldn't... No more pain...

"Nosferatu!" I screamed and I felt her power become my own and I fell from exhaustion and pain.

"Things will go a lot smoother if you just do as you are told." He sang. I glared up at him hatred and despair filling my eyes until it fell down my cheeks, and he only laughed and told me, "Go clean yourself up."

I left and walked to my room. I stood in the archway calmly then screamed. I ripped books from my shelves and tore at them, then stopped as the pain in my arms seared from the movement. So I sat on my bed and cried, my arms limp and in pain from the cuts.

I heard a knock at the door, and I screamed, "Go away." But the door opened and Blanche stepped inside. "What do you want?" I snapped. She shifted uncomfortably. "I heard you crying..."

"Yeah? So what?" I growled. "There is nothing you can do! Just go!" She came and sat by me and I just turned my head away to ignore her. She placed her hands gently on my arms and pulled vapor out of the air to heal the cuts. Relief flooded my body, I started to cry again, but I wasn't sure why. We sat silently for a bit until I spoke, "Thank you, Blanche... I'm sorry I yelled at you..." She nodded and gave me a hug. "What happened?" She asked.

"I fell into a rose bush in the garden." The lie rolled off my tongue. "Please try and be more careful then..." She smiled brightly, "I love you, Noire."

"I love you too, Blanche..." I smiled weakly at her. She smiled then bounded out. I felt joy but as soon as she left, hatred for my father filled me again. I wouldn't let him hurt her.

The tyrant would die. I did not know how but I would destroy him. I left my room, and stood in the corridor, looking at the painting of my father, the man in the portrait had a kind smile. I snorted at how inaccurate the painting was. I was distracted by footsteps and scurried into my room, they were unfamiliar to me... I peeked out and saw Lily. Her emotions of fear, dread, and apprehension reached me, and played with the dark magic inside me. I watched her stand by my

father's door, and hesitate to knock, and then I knew exactly what the poor girl had been sent for. The same reason many of the female servants were sent there for.

I left the archway and began to read a book left for me by Blanche. After reading about halfway, I couldn't read anymore. A dashing hero to save a Princess from a dragon: pathetic. I laid back and heard the door to my father's room click open, just as an idea popped into my mind. An evil smile played on my lips, no hero would save me, but I could save myself. I walked into the corridor and caught Lily as she left the tyrant's room. Her eyes were red from crying, and I used this as an excuse to talk to her.

I timidly called out to her, "Lily?" She jumped until she realized who was speaking.

"You're that girl..." She said. I nodded solemnly, "I'm sorry, I couldn't... he made me..." She nodded, and timidly answered, "I know."

I took both her hands and stared at her intensely, "We can get through this; I won't let him win." She looked back startled but nodded, unknowing of what I had done. Her mother had now died by my father's hand, her Father now loved her more than anything in the world and she had been stolen from him. My father had beaten her which may or may not have actually happened.

My hatred was imprinted onto her mind. My need to kill him was now copied into her being. If I could not destroy him then maybe she could for me. For a moment, I despised myself... I shouldn't have done that, but soon my hatred flared again. It did not matter, he needed to be destroyed. Twisting her memories was a little thing compared to what he had done and what he could and would do.

She continued down the hallway, her steps harder, angrier, and I knew the spell had been successful.

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"Princess Noire...?" I heard someone say softly. I ignored them. If they addressed me in that manner, they obviously did not have any authority over me. I keep my eyes closed, hoping they would give up and go away.

"Princess Noire." They said a little louder. I growled, and moved to look at who was addressing me. By their attire I could tell he was a servant.

"You better have a very good reason for disturbing me." I said, he shifted uneasily and stared blankly at me, I sighed and queried, "Well?"

"Your father has instructed me to wake you..." I looked at the sun, and shot out of bed, I was late for lessons!

"Princess Noire...?" I looked back at him like he was an idiot. "What? Can you not see I'm already late, and need to be dressed? Unless you think that is your job today." My irritation turning to amusement as he flushed, and put his hands up defensively, "No, no, Princess Noire, King Meringue has instructed me to also tell you to pack."

"Pack..." I looked at him puzzled and with a slight frown, "For what?"

"From what I understand, your journey to the Kingdom of GreyHawk."

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## Chapter 5

I had just finished lessons with Timberone when my father called me to his chambers. I half-heartedly curtsied to him, my spirit had been broken. I lost the only person who would have loved me, and I—I had loved him. There was no way to hide my anguish. My father commanded me, "Smile!" I moved the corners of my mouth upward but I was only baring my fangs, hatred flourished inside me. One day... I would kill that son of a bitch. He laughed at my pseudo-smile. Then he dismissed his servants from his room, and closed the door with a wave of his hand.

"Do you know why I called for you, Noire?" He queried.

"Probably to do your dirty work for you." I replied numbly. He laughed at me. I was too tired to feel.

"Just think of his territory as more for you when you rule." He grinned. I clenched my fists, the best I could do. I would not let myself die before I killed him. He laughed harder at my ability to do nothing.

"For the record, you are in fact here to do my dirty work." I glared up at him. "Oh and what will you have me do?" I said hatefully.

"I have some distressing news. Seems your mother been unfaithful to me and Blanche is not your sister." I processed this slowly. Technically she was still my sister, or rather half-sister at least but I guess he made his lines of family very clear cut.

"I think it's quite obvious what I want you to." I stood there frozen in fear. What did he want? Me to kill Blanche and my mother?!

"You... want me to kill Blanche and my mother...!" I whispered in terror.

"No, no. Not Blanche; she can't help her whore of a mother."

"My mother is not a whore. If anyone is, it's you. I'm not stupid. I see your mistresses and maids stay the night with you. If my mother strayed, you are no doubt the reason." I spit. He laughed again, "When you're King you can do anything. You'll see eventually."

He adjusted his weight as he stood. "You will kill your mother, but not poor, sweet Blanche. She's not in line for the throne anyway now." He said sickly sweet, almost enough to make me gag.

"You cannot kill her! The Sorcerer's Seal!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, I cannot hurt her, but I can command you to do so." He smiled, "Not much you can do it unless you want to die on the spot, now can you, Noire."

I fell to my knees, "Please, reconsider Father." I bowed my head in respect and as a plea. "She has given you a viable heir. Me. Blanche wasn't in the running anymore anyway. Please spare her... I have already lost Sigmund and I loved him, truly, and I will never have love like that again... Please do not take my mother..." I did beg, it was not in character but I couldn't lose another one I loved. "I beg you, Father, and I do not beg. Please spare her..."

He sighed, "Noire..." He placed his hand on my shoulder, "You don't understand." He patted my head softly, "Love is weakness; I am doing this for your own good." I stared up at him in horror and his eyes simply danced with Umbaresh. "Kill her, and you will be one step closer to true strength. I expect you to do so."

He left the room, and I stayed kneeling on the floor. My mind was blank, then emotions sunk in. I was desolate. I didn't want to kill my mother but I didn't want to die either, but maybe my death would be for the best. I had failed. My original purpose was to protect my family and how successful had I been at protecting anything or everything. All those people... My Sigmund... now my mother... If love was my weakness, how long until I was to destroy Blanche? No, he would keep Blanche alive. If he destroyed everything I loved. I would stop fighting and let myself die. It was so clever, I both despised and admired it.

I got up and walked to Blanche's room, it was covered in flora and fauna of every sort, and when I appeared unexpected to her room, she brightened into a huge smile. "Noire!" She gave me a big hug and I returned it, lingering the hug a little longer than I should have but she was oblivious. "I learned something new all by myself." She said excitedly. I couldn't help but smile softly, "Oh, and what is that?" She excitedly stood up and haphazardly slid a bucket full of water over, and even the bucket seemed excited.

She swiped a blonde strand from her face, "Okay, so you know how I can only use light magic through my hands?" I nodded. "Well, she continued, "I can only use water magic with my



wand, but... If I try both at the same time..." She took her juniper wand in her right hand and focused a beam of light out of her left. Her tongue was out in concentration, and if I was not preparing for my death, I would have laughed.

After hard determination, a weak rainbow appeared, making her room its own world. Blanche's world, where nothing could go wrong.

"That's really cool, Blanche!" I said excitedly but the laugh I had after in joy was dampened by my dread. She laughed after me, and said, "Yeah, I thought so too. I actually wanted to show you first sooooo... Perfect timing." She smiled at me. She swiped that blonde strand again behind her ear, "So what brings you by? You usually come by later in the afternoon." She grinned at me.

"Well, I'm on my way to mother's room, but I just wanted to stop by..." She nodded, "Hmm okay, well, I won't keep you any longer." She put her wand away, "Will I still see you later?" I hesitated, then pretended to be distracted by a bug.

"Probably not, I have a lot of work to do with Timberone, that's why I stopped by for a bit too, and Blanche... If you didn't have so many plants, I wouldn't be bombarded by bugs." She stuck out her tongue, and I turned to leave. I stopped in the archway without turning around and said, "Blanche?" She distractedly answered, "Yes?" I paused a moment so my voice wouldn't break, "I love you." She happily replied with an, "I love you too."

I quickened my pace into the hall, my eyes watering. I'm surprised that the Sorcerer's Seal hadn't killed me yet, I was preparing to disobey... Why had it not destroyed me? I walked to mother's room and walked in quietly, she had just removed a tea bag from her cup, the floral smell I recognized and despised. "Jasmine." I said. My mother jumped and whipped around eyes wide, "Oh, Noire. It's you." I would have thought it strange if it weren't for how my father operated. We were all jumpy and easily startled.

She set down her tea and turned to me, "What brings you by?" I took a deep breath, "Well, first... I want you to know I love you." She looked at me surprised and gestured for me to sit, then said, "I... love you as well."

I shook my head, "Please don't say it, if you don't mean it. I think I know why you cannot love me, but that is unimportant right now." I then did take her offer to sit.

"I don't have a lot of time." I moved, uncomfortably adjusting in my seat, "Father knows Blanche is not your child..."

The Queen replied, "I know." She did not turn to me, instead she poured in her cream, "And who has he sent to kill me?"

"Me." She turned to face me and looked startled then amused, "I guess you weren't specific enough in your Sorceror's Seal. Hmm?" She turned back to her tea, "Well, are you going to kill me? My back is turned, it's easy. Or will you start with a monologue about how cruel I treated you? How you knew Blanche was my favorite and always will be and how you hurt?" She sneered.

The words bit into my flesh, but I replied, "No... Mother... I have come to say goodbye, and that I love you, regardless of any of our disagreements, and that I forgive you for anything you feel needs forgiveness and I hope you will forgive me as well, of any pain I have caused you, both knowing and unknowing." I looked up at her, my stare holding fast.

"Mother, I will do the right thing this time. I will die. I don't know when the Seal will kill me, maybe when I outright tell Father no, but I will not kill you. It ends here." What she did next surprised me, she came over to me and hugged me, tenderly.

"Noire, it truly wasn't your fault..." She lifted my chin up, and tears were streaming down my face. "Will you be so kind? There is something I want to show you..." She gestured to her tea and walked to her closet, "It just needs some sugar."

I walked over and stopped, I did not know how she liked her tea. "How many scoops?" I queried. "Three." Was her reply, just how I liked it. I carefully placed three scoops of sugar into the tea, and stirred. The sugar melted quickly, or maybe time was just sped up by my fear of death.

She returned and placed something in my hand, as she took her tea from me. When I opened my hand, a ring encrusted in diamonds shone in my hand. "This is why I hated you. Go on." I looked up at her. "I know the tyrant taught you dark magic, use it. See my past." I closed my eyes and focused on my mother's essence in the ring, bypassing its creation, and passing of hands. I held the perspective of the ring.

I saw flashes of happiness. Her marriage to a man I had never seen, later caressing my mother's cheek lovingly as she held a child in her arms, maybe around three, male, struggling to get out of her arms in order to play in a garden I recognized in Taikiyama, the one with the swan in the middle but the left wing had not been torn off. Then blood, the man lay dying, my father, a monster... her marriage to him against her will, her rape, and I watched uncomfortably and only partially. I didn't want to see it, I saw myself form in my mother's stomach: her hatred and sadness, mixed with warmth as she held the three year old's hand. My father choosing to kill me for I was not male, my mother fighting to protect me, and my father's murder of the three year old because it was better to have his own flesh and blood on the throne than a male from another man. The child's name rang on my tongue in a taste of misery, "Masaaki."

I felt myself say aloud, "That's why mother... I'm so sorry... I..." I opened my eyes to break from the past and my mother laid sprawled in her chair, eyes open. "Mother." My blood ran cold, "Mother!" I touched her, her pulse was gone. In a panic, I searched her body. There were no marks, no arrows, or cuts or slashes. I had not been in the vision long... The teacup lay broken on the stone floor, and the tea was soaked up by the gaudy rug adorning the floor.

Poison... She killed herself... No, she had me do it... I put the sugar in which wasn't sugar in her teacup. "You coward... You coward!" I screamed at her body, "Who will take care of Blanche!? You should have run! You could have taken her to Taikiyama, they would have protected her, both of you! Coward!" I shook in anger. I sat back in the chair: in anger... in despair... Why wasn't I dead?! Let me die...

"Please, let me die..." It became vocal, I asked over and over again hoping some God or some spirit would answer my prayer, but the prayer was not answered and no God was listening.

My anger subsided, and turned only to grief. The Seal hadn't killed me... why? I disobeyed. I wasn't going to kill her... Was it that the Seal knew I would kill her by her choosing? There is no way. A spell is a spell, it's not sentient. It wouldn't know. Or what if... it was because I was not truly ready to die and subconsciously was planning on killing her? I admit entertaining the idea, but anyone would have, the will to survive is instinctual, but I had been steeled in my resolve...

"Why wouldn't it kill me...?" I wondered and despaired. Is it because I chose to die...? I was not allowed to kill myself and I had given up... Is that what kept me alive...? So... the only way to die... was to not want to die and disobey... He was such a clever bastard... I laughed and my tears streamed down. I could not win. I wasn't smart enough. I wasn't clever enough.

I stopped thinking and watched my mother, lifeless. I kneeled beside her and held her hand. The shadows crawled up the wall.

Only when it was time for dinner did anyone discover us. The maidservant screamed, Philip gently tugged me away from my mother, and held me against his chest, not exactly in comfort but to hold me out of the way. He carried me to my room and laid me on my bed, then left. I laid there. Everything was gone. Everything.

Time passed but neither I nor my body realized. Eventually, a rap was heard on my door. I did not move, or acknowledge, it was as if I did not hear the sound at all. A Blanche filled with misery entered the room, I had never seen that emotion on her face, and I never wanted to again. I took in a slow breath, I had no energy, just trying to speak was almost more than I could bear, "Go...away..." Instead she pulled the chair from my desk and brought it over to the bed.

"Noire..." She took my hand tenderly. I did not move, nor did I speak, but I mustered enough strength to squeeze her hand, I could not disappoint her. I laid on my bed and she sat by me in silence, just holding my hand.

"Would you like some tea, Noire?" I took in a slow deep breath, and "No," was released in the exhale. Ignoring my response, she kissed my forehead, and said, "I'll get you tea." I was too exhausted to be annoyed, or feel, so again I just lay there, until she came back with a steaming cup of Earl Grey tea. I recognized the scent as she came in as it was my favorite tea.

She placed the cup on my bedside table then she forced me to sit up, she placed the cup in my hand. I stared down at it, and I felt her expectation. I placed the cup to my lips and sipped, sickly sweet Earl Grey tea, I could not disappoint her.

"I was hoping for mint." I smiled sadly and stuck out my tongue. She stuck out her tongue back, "Thank you, Blanche." I smiled as best I could, "I feel better now." And I did, just not enough. She nodded with a soft smile. I moved enough to give her a hug. "It's late, Noire... We both need to sleep..." She gave my hand a squeeze, and I gave a soft smile back. She left and the room felt darker.

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(King Colbert has commanded Noire to kill Blanche and his step son, Gris. Noire tells Blanche to run to Taikiyama. Noire plans on following to kill them if she fails to get rid of her father. Mianafex is the Halberd said to have been forged by Umbaresh.)

I walked into my Father's chambers, and bowed in respect as I was required. His eyes turned to me dark and dull. "Are they dead?"

I shook my head no, "They have run, but their only safe haven would be mother's original kingdom, Taikiyama. No other kingdom in their right mind would defy us or protect us. I propose a plan that not only extinguishes Blanche and Gris but takes the Kingdom of Taikiyama for ourselves." He looked at me pleased and mildly confused and nodded for me to continue.

"We use the excuse of apprehending Blanche and Gris with a handful of men, you and I, to access their fortress. The people of Taikiyama are known for their excessive pride and hospitality, so in order to take advantage of that hospitality, we will make sure we arrive close to nightfall. They will be inclined to let us rest there that night. That night, I will map out their palace with my earth and dark magic tracer spell, and then we collect Blanche and Gris. I will kill them out of Taikiyama's sight. We will then attack, ripping apart the stone with our earth mages at the most vulnerable positions and kill their royalty. The people love the Council and to lose them will crush their spirit and there will be no resistance to the takeover."

His eyes widened in surprise, "A well thought out plan. What inspired this?" I gave a lopsided grin, "I want my palace in the mountains, rather strategic really. I can't beat your game, so I might as use it to my advantage. My time will come."

I paused then, "Shall I make preparations?" He nods and replies, "We leave tomorrow regardless." I bow and depart.

After the war council meeting, I met my father for dinner. Quail was the main course paired with rosemary potatoes and asparagus tips. And the servant's poured us some Pinot Noir, how apropos considering my name, to pair with our quail.

"Soon you will have no competition for the throne," He spoke, "I'm proud of you, Noire. I was afraid you were weak but you have driven weakness from your body." My body tingled.

I smiled and he watched me as I pulled out a vial and poured it into my wine, and gulped some down. I watch his face sink, his face became pale as I lifted my head from my glass and gave him a grin. He opened his mouth to speak, "What was that?"

I dipped my pinky in my wine then caressed the top of my glass, and a strong C sharp rang through the room and seemed to echo. I laughed and replied, "The antidote, you poor son of Umbaresh."

He raised his hand and my goblet flew to his hand and he gulped down the remainder of my wine, ran down his shirt, staining like blood. He looked back at me, and my face was expressionless.

"It was a good try, Noire, but you just aren't smart enough to defeat me." He looked back at me triumphantly. I slumped over and began to shake, and shudder, but no longer could I contain it. My laughter echoed in the empty room and I stood up and as he saw the glimmer in my eye, I saw an emotion of my father's face I had never seen that I now relished: Fear.

"Just what is so funny, Noire?!" He lifted his arm up to blast me with fire no doubt, but it fell limply to his side. I watched as he started to convulse, and foam started to pour from his mouth.

"What I poured into my glass was the poison father." I stood up and flashed my fangs,

"Checkmate." I smirked at him.

"Give me the antidote!" He screamed through his saliva. Relying on the Sorcere's Seal to save him.

I shrugged, "Sorry, Father. There is no cure." He looked at me confused. "Oh, so you must be curious as to why I'm fine."

My eyes flashed, "It's Wyvern poison. Since I am bound to Aster, I am not affected. Let me explain, if I had simply used snake poison it wouldn't have mattered, because most snake poisons are digestible, and I couldn't just hope for a cut or such so the poison could reach your blood stream, but Wyverns are unique. Not only are they venomous but they are poisonous. I'd explain the difference, but the knowledge would be wasted on you because soon," I smiled,

"You will be dead."

He screamed in an attempt to command me, but his words came out as half-groaned screams, the paralyzing effect of the poison was faring quite nicely.

"What was that Father? I couldn't understand you. Repeat it to me!" I laughed.

A servant rushed in and glanced at my father then back to me. I smiled kindly, "Don't mind his mewling; he'll be dead soon enough."

My father looked at the servant pleadingly but the servant spit in his direction and left. "Now, the next order of business." I said more to myself than to my father. I placed my hand on his forehead, fully paralyzed now, and whispered, "Nosferatu." I felt his power sink into me, my body convulsed slightly and felt chilled. I was not accustomed to this much power. I chuckled to myself, I had dreamed of this for so long. Then I whispered, "Cache recolti," stealing his memories so I would know how to use his knowledge.

My father's energy had changed. The anger... it had changed... My stomach curdled as I realized...his emotions. He was proud of me, his eyes were smiling at me, even as he lay dying. His eyes were laughing at me. Anger boiled inside me. How dare he?! I had won! I had won!!



"Stop looking at me like that!!" I screamed. He obviously could not move, but his eyes smiled harder. I raised my hand to slap him but stopped. He was baiting me. If I harmed him I would die due to the Sorcerer's Seal. I technically had not killed him either, he had poisoned himself.

I screamed in rage. I screamed at him, "You took everything! You're a monster! You wanted me to kill everyone in my family! You ordered me to kill a child! You made me kill Sigmund! I loved him you son of Umbaresh! Who else would ever love me? Answer me that? I loved him you harelot-loving bastard!"

I destroyed everything in the room, the paper from shredded books swirling in the gusts of my fury.

I fell to my knees in silence. "You took everything and hurt everyone..." I clenched my fists, then raised myself again. "But I get the last laugh, I won and my prize will be watching you take your last ragged breath."

I pulled a chair over gaudy with gold, and watched his shuddering breath. Eventually it shortened and then it stopped. And the horrible shine in his eyes finally subsided.

I gasped and jolted as my arm flashed... And the latticework of shadow adorning my flesh, vanished. I was free, but I was... still... so...angry...

I rang for a servant, with my father's bell. The same servant from before rushed in, "Would you be so kind as to clean up this mess?" I didn't bother to turn my head.

"Yes, Princess Noire."

"Queen now." I replied amused.

"Y-yes, Queen Meringue." He bowed.

"I'll pay all of the servants double of what my father paid you from now on but first do me a favor and send out a message to all?"

"Yes, Queen Meringue?" He bowed deeply.

"Queen Noire if you please. I'm not fond of the surname." He nodded.

"If you would be so kind as to spread the good news," I said turning to face him, "The King is dead." He nodded gratefully and scurried off.

I stood up then went down the corridor and up to my tower. I did not call for my servants. I changed out of my ridiculous, frilly dress, and curved blackened metal to my body for armor. I breathed out, "Much better." I slipped on steel-toed boots, and raised my hair into a slick ponytail, then walked to the throne room. Two servants opened the door for me. I stepped inside. I took in a deep breath: The Kingdom was mine.

I smiled to myself until I saw a familiar serpentine figure seated on my throne. I walked up the marble steps.

"And just what do we have here? A child playing Queen?" I mused aloud. I heard one of the servant's chuckle, but Constantia was not amused. "What did you say, harlot?!"

"Poor thing," I replied with a smirk, "Apparently, deaf too."

Constantia fumed, and screamed at me, "Get out of my palace, you worthless piece of shit. You're banished from my Kingdom!"

I continued up the marble steps, and smirked, "There seems to be a mistake. That throne, that thing you happen to be sitting on, is mine." I said coolly.

"I was the Queen so I am now the ruler."

"That in theory would true," I spoke, but when I looked up, I saw her cringe in fear as power flashed in my eyes, "but you have no power to keep it."

"Guards!" She screamed, but none came to her aid, "Guards!!" She screamed more frantically.

"You made a fatal error, Constintia." I mused, "They fear me more than love or fear you. If one could love or fear you, really."

"I am queen! I will rule! That is how it works, Noire!" I lifted my arm and some of the metal curled around my body melded with iron collected from the swords and halberds that hung from the wall, and transformed into a claw. I ripped her from the throne and threw her to the ground. I heard her cry in terror, misery, and anger as I walked up the steps and sat on my Fa—no... my throne. She was blubbering, "What will I do!? Where will I go?!"

"Frankly, Constintia. I don't particularly care, but let me say," I propped my arm on the armrest of the throne and rested my cheek against my fist and grinned,

"I love the way you grovel."

I relaxed and crossed my legs, "Here's a suggestion. Why don't you find your son in Taikiyama and start being the mother you always should have been?" She opened her mouth to say something but I cut her off with a wave my hand.

"Let me make something perfectly clear, Constintia. If you do not turn to leave my Kingdom in the next three seconds, I will slice your head clean from your body. Understood?" I watched as she scuttled out of the room.

"Philip"

"Guards," I spoke, they moved into positions of attention, "Make sure she packs her bags and leaves before daybreak." They dispersed to do my bidding, and power had never felt so good.

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(Noire has ruled from many years with an iron fist, dealing out punishment as a self-proclaimed God. Her sister, Blanche, has become the figurehead of Taikiyama and is trapped in Taikiyama by the Council there. Noire has been accused of assassinating Blanche in the attempt to weaken the faith the people of Taikiyama have in their government. Taikiyama has called for

an Agni Kai. A fight to the death between the best warrior from each kingdom. It is meant to be an entire war without the loss of numerable lives and the victor of the fight is deemed the winner of the war.)

## Chapter 20

When I awoke, I felt strangely at ease. The rain from the previous night did not stop the song birds from feeling cheerful this morning. I contemplated going back to sleep, letting the wet smell and sun rays coax me back to sleep, but I figured, I might as well get ready for noon and make sure I had lunch early since Taikiyama so rudely chose lunchtime to fight to the death.

I stripped off the silk nightgown and did a light coat of armor from the scrap metal adorning my room, making sure to grab Mianafex, as I left. I turned down the hall, fairly refreshed from my night's rest, opened the doors through the throne room and cut across to the dining hall.

When I arrived Philip brought me poached salmon with egg and arugala, light but full of protein.

"Philip."

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

"Tea. Earl Grey. One scoop of sugar, please." I surprised myself. In a good mood if I was willing to use my manners. How uncharacteristic of me. I felt even Philip's surprise but he only replied with, "Yes, Your Majesty."

Soon, another servant brought me my tea, and I slowly sipped, realizing, I didn't know the majority of the servants' names, besides Philip's. Mostly because there was no reason to get attached when King Colbert ruled, surprised Philip survived this long. I snorted at my own

thoughts, why should I care about the servants' names? They were loyal and were paid generously and that was all that should matter.

I finished breakfast and looked at the time. Barely past 10. I rolled my eyes mentally, before getting up and walking out to the courtyard, the roses still lightly sprinkled with last night's rain. I turned and walked to the stables. Aster had already been saddled for the afternoon spar, I thought it a bit early but at least it had been done.

*Good morning, Aster.*

*Good morning, Noire. How did you sleep? It seems you slept very well and you seem calm and confident. Good. Insecurity and sleep deprivation leads to error.*

*There is no reason to worry, Aster. I'm not worried.* And I wasn't. I was mostly irritated and wanted to start my search for Blanche.

*The fact you aren't a little worried, perturbs me, but I suppose confidence is good.* Aster shook herself to loosen her muscles. *I'm going off to hunt before noon. Would you care to join me?*

I shook my head. *I kind of just want to sit in the garden for a bit and relax before noon.*

*Alright, Grandma Noire. Suit yourself.* Aster spread her wings and ascended, shaking the lilies as she flew. I smiled as I watched her off and went to sit in the gazebo. So many memories in this garden. My mother with her tea and the mint leaves nestled in the bottom with a servant keeping her shaded while Blanche played with Goldie, her fur shining in the sun. I swallowed hard remembering the memory. Perhaps the garden had not been such a good idea.

I brought Mianafex into my lap, the black metal beautiful in its own right, smooth and intricately designed with raised patterns around the almost axe-like blade, the same raised design adorned the spike and hook. It truly was practical art... I wouldn't doubt it had been crafted by Umbaresh if I believed in those myths.

I stayed in the garden quite awhile, watching the wind shake the willow trees lining the garden, listening to the birds enjoy the morning. Strangely, I felt at peace.

"Your Majesty." I turned to look, and Philip stood behind me. "Lunch is ready, and with 45 minutes before your Gani Ikan."

"Thank you, Philip." I stood and walked back to the dining hall.

Again, it was light. Fruit and cheese lined the wooden board presented to me. I bit into a fig and paired it with the brie, mindless eating as time ticked by. Soon, I would have Blanche back. Everything was going to be okay.

I finished eating and stood, and walked confidently across the stone back to the courtyard and then to the stable where Aster waited patiently for me.

*Are you ready, Noire?* She whipped her tail in anticipation.

*For it to be over with, yes.* I hitched myself over onto Aster's back, Mianafex in hand.

"For Blanche." I said aloud, raising Mianafex. Aster flew into the air, my guards and servants following. The guards to intervene if need be, the servants for the gossip of seeing it firsthand.

When I landed outside of my fortress's walls. I unsurprisingly saw Taikiyama's army, waiting in case I failed to show for the Gani Ikan. Larger than I imagined but no match for my Fa-- my own.

"Queen Noire Meringue of Friandises," A warrior spoke, I could only guess he was Noritama. "I am Noritama Hashimoto of Taikiyama."

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance. Can't wait for the unnecessary blood bath." I pursed my lips after my flippant response. Noritama frowned and continued,

"I am here to gain vengeance for Blanche Meringue's li--"

I raised my hand to silence him, "Look, I have no quarrel with you and I don't appreciate this tromping about in my territory with false claims. Let me make this simple, show me Blanche, or this fight to the death will not end in just yours but in your kingdom's."

"We do not have Blanche, Queen Meringue... it was very obvious you murdered her. The trace of your magic reeked all over her room. I'm impressed with your stealth but only cowards murder in the night." I could tell by his face he was telling he truth, or at least what he believed to be the truth. Of course this was to be expected, how silly of me, a warrior wouldn't be involved in a political scandal, only a peon required to carry out the dirty work.

"So, I would assume you are resolved in your stance? You will not believe my love for Blanche was pure, the only family I had left? That I murdered her in cold blood?"

"Well, if the evidence wasn't clear, and that you wouldn't gain anything from her death, like instability in Taikiyama from the death of their beloved Princess, I would be inclined to believe you."

"And this is not a ploy by the Council to keep the status quo, have you thought of that?" I remarked.

"The Council has done nothing but the best for this Kingdom."

"What they see best for the Kingdom, don't you mean?" I replied.

"I will not continue to listen to your poisonous slander. Prepare to die this day for Princess Blanche!" He called for his mount, a Pegasus, and hiked himself over, lance in hand. Hmm... how convenient . . . wonder if I could manage a feather... I refocused on the fight ahead.

"So be it, but you are mistaken in your accusations, and you will die this day, Lumighton forgive you." I readied Mianafex, the power surging in my bloodthirsty hand. Could Blanche be dead...? Could the Council have killed her to keep power? I refused to believe it as well, they adored her, but who didn't adore Blanche? I agreed with Noritama, I was a more likely murderer.

Aster flew back to give us more room to assess our opponent. "Shall we then?" I said. Noritama simply nodded. A servant of Taikiyama stepped out and reiterated the rules, I was well acquainted with them and focused my energy watching Noritama's movement. He seemed uneasy. Good, I had planted the thought in his head. His fighting would be off. The servant then signaled for the fight to begin.

Noritama wasted no time in closing, but it was foolish. I could feel his uneasiness and distress, it was easy to move Aster out of the way and whip his mount with Aster's spiked tail. His hesitation allowed me a swing with Mianafex, but he recovered in time to raise his shield, but not enough to keep Aster from flying back to gain some distance.

"Are you only going to run? Coward!" He tried to goad me, but he knew perfectly well I was gauging him and wouldn't fall victim to his poor attempt at shaking me. My same calm from this morning was with me, panic only created mistakes.

He rushed me again. I simply spun Aster off his momentum to avoid him. Child's play. I was hoping this would be more interesting of a fight. I might as well end it quickly, there was nothing to gain by playing with my prey. I took metal from my armor and sent sharp shrapnel flying at him and his steed. He did not move, but the shrapnel did not hit him nor his mount. It bounced off like a Light Rune protection spell... but that would be cheating. Royal magic wasn't allowed in an Gani Ikan.

"How dare you." I called out, "Light and Dark Runes are forbidden in an Gani Ikan, and you accuse me of being dishonorable."

Noritama raised his gauntlet high, "I have broken no such code, Your Majesty. Gialtas protects me." I felt my confidence drop when I realized what had happened, the gauntlet of Gialtas made it impossible for me to hit him with my magic. I would be relying on my weaponry skills and intelligence alone. I felt my own fear creeping in, my dark magic feeding off it and



increasing it, which was bad for me. Noritama saw my panic, making his own confidence increase.

He rushed me. Aster turned to the side and I raised Mianafex forward, hoping to pierce his mount with the spike but the lance caught on the underside of Mianafex's blade, I pulled it to the side, the lance narrowly missing piercing my skull. I felt my fear run my blood cold.

I felt him reel back, and quickly make a shield from the metal of my armor, leaving skin exposed. I quickly split it into shrapnel again but released it from its magical ties, velocity carrying it to where it needed to go, he flicked his shield, a wall of earth raising to protect him. How...? Ah, his wand was crafted into the shield, clever, and I had foolishly left my side open.

*Get it together, Noire. You are still a fine Halberdier. You aren't weak just because you cannot use your magic.*

*How is this fair, Aster? He can use magic and I cannot. This is a rigged fight.*

*You lose as soon as you accept defeat, Noire.*

Aster was right, I had to get myself together. I raised Mianafex and let out a cry, startling Noritama, as I swung Mianafex around me to gain momentum, clashing against his armor, his shoulder plate flying off from the strength of the blow, exposing skin. I felt my blood boiling from the unfairness of this duel. But we were both vulnerable now, skin exposed, and it could prove fatal.

He charged me again, was he really so foolish?. He had done so three times already, I raised Mianafex to parry it, only to have Noritama unexpectedly raise a wall of earth to raise the tip of his lance straight for my heart. I waited for the impact but it never came. Aster had turned, taking the blow for me. She curled up around me to protect me and we plummeted back to Evalon, her body breaking my fall.

We hit the dirt hard, my vision blurring as I struggled to stand, as I removed myself from her body.

Aster. I called to her, but there was no response. Aster! I turned to look closely, the lance had pierced her heart.

"Aster!" I cried aloud, I shook her, but I logically knew it was futile. I felt tears form in my eyes.

"The battle isn't over Queen Meringue." I heard Taikiyama say. I turned to see him off his mount and equipped with a broadsword. I felt my blood boil. I stood and blinded by rage swung the Halberd at his helmet, he blocked me with his shield but using the momentum from ricocheting off his shield, I spun the Halberd around and it clattered against the other side of his helmet. In my rage I had left my exposed side wide open, but it hadn't mattered. Noritama hadn't expected the attack and was stunned momentarily. I took it as an opportunity to thrust the spike into his chest, hoping to pierce the armor and if not that, at least knock him back.

It was better than I had hoped, he fell back, unable to keep his balance from the weight of his armor. I went in for the kill thrusting the tip under his helmet, a small sliver of skin exposed.

Mianafex was caught between the blade of his sword, and was flung from my hands. He waved his shield and I dropped to the earth, his magic rolling the earth so I lost my footing. He waved it again to push himself back up to a standing position. He came down with a thrust, and I moved only fast enough to avoid my heart, but my exposed side took the blow, the blood pouring from my body, I yelled in pain. He stabbed again, I raised metal off my armor to take the blow. He anticipated again and I felt his blade pierce right below my heart. I gasped out in pain, but was unable to make a sound.

I took my only chance, I called Mianafex forward to trip him, but instead of falling back as I anticipated, he fell forward on top of me. I was losing my ability to breathe from the weight,

before he could recover, I sunk my teeth into his exposed shoulder, drawing blood. Noritama recovered and laughed, "You bit me? You're feisty, I'll give you that, Queen Meringue," He said looking me up and down, "but you will die from lack of blood if you don't allow me to end this quickly."

I gave up, exposing my body for death by his blade, or so he thought. He raised his blade only to have it clatter to his side. He looked at his hand confused and back at me. I smirked back weakly, "You may have killed Aster, but you forget the powers we gain from our familiars."

Noritama's eye went wide with fear as I watched Aster save me again through our bond, his mouth foamed as he dropped to his knees, yelling unintelligible curses about how I cheated.

I spit and replied, "You blocked my magic, it was never a fair fight, swine."

I reached out, transferring my wounds onto Noritama. He was a dead man anyway. I saw his eyes widen in pain as I transferred my lacerations to his body, his eyes glazing as he took his final breaths.

"Say hi to Umbaresh for me." I said coldly, before ripping off the armor blessed by Gialtas from his cold body and placing the gaudy gold gauntlet on my hand.

When I stood, I felt the energy of the entire army of Taikiyama, my dark magic feeding off of their fear from what they had just witnessed. I turned to face them.

"Warriors of Taikiyama..." I hesitated, "Actually, first things first." I gathered my armor, it returning to me to protect my body, before quickly sending a sharp shard of metal through Noritama's Pegasus' heart, and ripping out several feathers. I could feel the army's chills roll down their spine from my heartlessness.

"A familiar for a familiar, especially since your "noble warrior" Noritama was as virtuous as Amourline (A woman from mythology who purposely lead on two lovers in order to get gifts and other things to suit her interest). I am fully aware of your trickery and deceit in regards to

Gialtas' gauntlet. Taikiyama used to pride itself on its honor. How dishonorable you must have become." I called Mianafex to my hand.

I settled Mianafex's shaft's end into the soil and I addressed them, "Tell your Council that in six hours I will lay waste to the fortress of Taikiyama unless they can produce my sister, Blanche. If they fail to do so, I suggest the people of Taikiyama use those six hours to flee. I have no wish to harm the innocent, but I have allowed ample time for those who are wise to escape. Your Council has made a fatal error today, Lumighton lay you peacefully." I lifted Mianafex, and turned my back to walk back to my castle.

I used my armor, leaving myself unprotected to carry Aster's body back with me I heard the whoosh of an arrow fly towards me with deadly intent, I simply sent the metal tip flying back from whence it came. I heard a thunk and a groan as it hit its target and the thud of the body that was foolish enough to fly the arrow. I turned slightly to the army, narrowing my eyes, "Anyone else wish to meet Umbaresh this day? No? Good. I suggest you worry about the six hours that ."

I crossed through the gates of my castle, bringing Aster's body gently next to the willow trees to begin my work. I called for a shovel, and Philip was the one to hand it to me.

"Are you sure, your Majesty? You have servants for this sort of work." He looked at me puzzled.

I didn't bother to answer him and quietly, disturbed the earth beneath the willow tree Aster and I used to play under.

Ever time I felt tears swell in my eyes, I would dig harder to distract myself from my feelings. I felt hollow and empty, lost, enraged... Taikiyama would pay for its injustice.

After 3 hours of digging, the grave was ready. I gently placed Aster in the earth, before replacing the displaced soil, covering up the signs of my grief, but it was still there underneath. I

stood watching the plot for a long time, before heading inside to the throne room, giving the shovel and my exhaustion to the next servant I found.

I went straight to my room and began heating my cauldron. I should have practiced potions more, just getting the cauldron hot enough was hard enough.

I ground the sprig of rosemary, the three chamomile petals, as instructed and threw in the handful of hair Blanche left behind as well as the Pegasus feather, and hesitated, clenching her brush close to me. It was the only physical item she had left behind, and I had every intention of sending it to Taikiyama if they had continued to keep her from me. I gently ran my thumb over the design, if I didn't put it in the cauldron, I had almost no chance of finding her.

Before I could change my mind, I threw the brush into the cauldron and sacrificed a bit of my overflowing dark magic to the cauldron, a ting of regret overwhelming me momentarily before I returned to the task at hand.

The cauldron puffed, accepting my surrendered items and power. A gold liquid rose. The potion was complete.

I brought the liquid to my lips with a tea cup. The smell was... less than appetizing. I crinkled my nose in distaste before downing the thick as molasses liquid that tasted a little like pancakes...

I felt the spell retrace Blanche's steps from three days before, nothing caught my eye other than her drinking sickly sweet Earl Grey tea... Same old Blanche. I watched her on the third day go to her room when someone entered. Whoever it was, she didn't recognize them as I watched her eyes widen in confusion and her lips form the words "Who are you? What do you want?" in panic. Then all of a sudden, the spell cut off, like there was nothing left to see. I sipped more of the potion, in case I hadn't had enough.

"You called us?" Siale spoke

I watched the three days pass again... the sickly sweet Earl Grey tea... her eyes widened and ask "Who are you? What do you want?" and again the spell cut off. I scowled and sipped more again. Three days... Earl Grey... "Who are you? What do you want?"... cut off. I sipped again in fury...

Three days. Earl Grey. "Who are you? What do you want?" but this time I saw a splash of blood... I sipped again, and again, and again, and again, until I ran out of potion. In my frustration and fear, I threw the tea cup. The china shattered against the wall. I felt myself breathing heavily.

Was Blanche dead? It couldn't be... Taikiyama must still have her. The Kingdom would pay for my suffering.

I walked to the throne room, slamming the doors behind me and wildly bellowed "Philip!"

I watched as he scurried from out of the kitchen, "Yes, Your Majesty." He said with a low bow.

"Tell my Council to prepare for war and to meet me in the War Room. Tell General Tayr to prepare my army. I'm declaring war on Taikiyama, for the kidnapping of my sister, Princess Blanche."

"Queen Noire, don't you think it's a bit rash--"

I turned to him, my eyes flashing and with that he knew my answer. "Yes, Your Majesty..." He bowed and went on his way.

I hit the stone hard as I walked to the War Room. My eyes burning wild with fury. When I arrived, I struck the stone table, the reverberation messaged my mages to meet me in the War Room.

Siole was first to arrive in a puff of smoke, then Xenia appeared out of fog, Shmen in a gust of wind, and Honcord parted the walls from his quarters to stand at his place at the table.

"You called us?" Siole spoke.

"I have declared war on Taikiyama for the kidnapping of my sister Blanche." I could feel their reluctance fill the room. "There is no discussion, and there will be no hesitation." I spat, "Ready your armor, we leave in less than six hours. Don't get left behind." I turned to leave

"But Queen Noire," I heard Shemen's voice say, my eyes narrowed. "Not to speak out of turn, but is this really worth going to war with Taikiyama? They have a formidable army, and a mountain fortress. Not that you aren't powerful, my Queen. But is one person really worth the lives of many? How important is one person?"

I slung shrapnel from my armor, slicing his throat, and felt his blood meet at the corners of the stone blocks of the floor. "Not very, in this particular case." I felt the room turn to silent panic. I turned back to the remaining Mages, as the metal returned to my armor.

"Does anyone else have any suggestions? I'm very open to suggestions." I could hear the crazed in my own voice, but I did not care. Xenia shuffled nervously, while Siole and Honcord just stared stupidly. "I'll take that as a 'no.' Prepare yourselves. I expect you all at the main gates in an hour."

After I arrived at the gate, General Taysr approached me. I felt the irritation tingle up my arms.

"Good evening, your majesty. Sorry to bother you..."

"Well, you are." I spat, turning to face him full on.

He gulped but continued, "May I suggest not attacking at such a late hour? It will be difficult to maneuver over the rocky terr--"

"No, you may not suggest." I whipped back around and opened the stone gates for my soldiers to begin their march. I hear his footsteps follow my own.

"Queen Noire, you're marching them into the hands of Umbaresh for no other reason than one person. Please, have mercy."

"And anyone to turn back will dance with Umbaresh by my hand, stop wasting your breath on speech and focus on conserving it for the combat ahead. Understood?" I replied coolly.

He stared at me dumbfounded until a blaze of fury rose in his eyes, "Yes, your majesty."

I wonder if my eyes had burned just like that toward my father when I begged him to spare my mother, the same hopeless despair and anger that I was unable to change and forced to obey.

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When we arrived at the familiar wall of Taikiyama, it was silent. No birds chirped, and no one manned the gate, it was easy enough to flick the iron gate up. But I was suspicious, what traps lay in wait? One thing was for sure, they better not have touched one strand of hair on Blanche's blonde head.

I felt no traps, but I also felt no people residing in their homes.

"Search the main town, search everywhere. Find Blanche." I stomped myself into the air, bouncing from house to house on gusts of wind until I reached the main castle, and bust open the door. When I arrived only one Council member of Taikiyama remained, Alnora.

"Alnora." I growled, "Where's Blanche?"

She smiled sadly, "Hello, Queen Noire. I thought you of all people would know the answer to that. Why did you do it, Noire? She adored you... you were all she could ever talk about."

I stopped for a moment and swallowed, "Blanche?"

Alnora nodded, "I don't understand. Why did you kill her, Noire?"

"I'm sick of games Alnora, and I won't ask again, where is Blanche?"

"You killed her, Noire." I couldn't tell if she was lying or not.

"But I di--"



"You did, Noire! I watched with my own eyes!" She eyes shimmered in angered confusion.

I couldn't have... could I? No, she must be trying to make me doubt myself. I was too steeled in resolve. I lifted her with a puff of air and trapped her against the back wall, but just to make sure.

I walked towards her and placed my hand on her forehead, "Cache rectoli." Searching for memories of Blanche. Blanche had kept her kind spirit even in Taikiyama. Then I found the memory. I felt my blood turn cold, the flush rise to my cheeks as I watched my sister brutally murdered, a stab after stab with a dagger I had no recollection of, and the same face I saw in the mirror crazed, and bloodied.

It was impossible. No, it wasn't... Was I crazy? Was that the horrendous dreams, the being tired all the time? The dried blood I found on my armor. My father's laughter in the halls. I grabbed at my heart, as if to tear it out and perhaps I was trying to, and backed up, away, far away from Alnora.

"It's impossible," I turned to Alnora, "I loved Blanche. I couldn't have. She was all I had left, Alnora! You have to believe me!"

Alnora simply turned her head, unable to look at me.

"Why are you the only one here? Where is everyone? Where is Blanche, please?" I pleaded.

"They've fled, your power is well known and after what you did to Blanche... Only I remained to see why you murdered her." She whispered, "But you have no idea, you're crazy. You need help..."

"The only crazy one is you for not leaving!" I screamed, hurling an iron spear adorning the sides of the archway at her skull. I watched her close her eyes and the impact never came. I let the spear

clatter to the floor. I left before she had time to even open her eyes, the wind on her hair the only remnant of my presence.

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## Chapter 21

I clutched at the castle walls as I staggered back inside the throne room. Dizzy, I hit the floor and puked, the liquid filling the cracks of the lattice stonework in gold and black leftover from my father's reign. It was impossible.

I raised my hand to move the chunks of poached egg out of my way to the throne, failing, and only succeeded in resting my hand in the contents of my stomach. The smell made me hurl again, and I struggled but managed to stand once more. I loved Blanche.

"Love! Love!!!" I screamed, "Present tense! Present tense!" I staggered up the steps to the gold and black throne, the red velvet cushion laughing as I struggled and fell. Crawling on my hands and knees to draw myself up, pushing on the arm rests to finally sit on the throne. My father must have killed her. He must have killed her.

I slumped against the back of the throne, the threads of the fabric biting up and down my back.

"Leave me alone!" I screamed and scratched at the fabric. I was so thirsty.

"Philip! Philip!!!"

He scattered from the kitchen, and shifted uncomfortably from a safe distance.

"What's the matter? Scared I'll kill you too?" I laughed.

He stood silently, unsure of how to react.

"Mint tea, no sugar." I barked. He looked confused but obeyed the order and soon enough,

I had a steaming cup of mint tea in my hand.

I took a deep gulp of the tea, then spat it out, the tea cup falling from my hand and shattering on the tile.

"I hate mint." I sputtered, the tea dripping off my armor like water after rainfall.

"Noire..." I looked up trying to see who was talking to me...

"Queen Noire." I replied.

"Queen Noire, please." Said Philip's voice, and I felt him rest his hand gently on my shoulder.

"Don't touch me!" I slapped at his hand, barely managing to make contact. I felt his presence leave, but could see nothing.

"Blanche is alive. I saw her in the garden this morning." I told the room. I raised my hand over a shard of porcelain from the teacup I had shattered, the head of a chimera in silver decorated the piece.

I slid the piece over my skin to prove I was alive. The red liquid dripped to the floor, I felt my mother's ring warm against my skin, and the cut healed. I curled my lip in irritation and cut again, only to have her light magic heal me over and over.

I cried out from emotional pain, I couldn't even focus on physical pain. And for the first time since my youth, I felt tears form in my eyes. I refuse to be weak. I stumbled from the throne back to my bedroom, slamming the door. The echo vibrating my own skin, and it sent the servants scattering.

I destroyed my room looking. I threw the potion books to the floor, ripping them from the bookshelf. "It has to be in here..." I growled. With no luck, I ripped at the first book that reached my hand, then to the next, and the next, and the-- the next didn't rip... I opened it up and what I wanted was there. I pulled out the now dried Tsilberry leaf, dry and withered from when I had hidden it.

I popped it in my mouth and chewed waiting for the mind numbing effects to take effect. I needed it fresh, the drug was impotent. I could feel every little thing...

I didn't remember falling but I ended up on the floor, I watched as quartz as black as burned timber form on my fingers, it slowly crept up my hands, up my arms, up my neck, down my chest and stomach, finally over my legs.

I felt no panic, only relief, even as I took my last breath; the black crystallizing over my lips.

### Noire's Relationship with her Mother

The book begins with a scene that will recur throughout the book:

"Again, my mother was under a glass held by a servant, keeping the hot midday sun off her face, sipping tea with mint leaves nestled at the bottom, watching Blanche with a smile, but she would never do the same for me."

(Karbassz, Excerpt 3).

Not only does this address that Blanche, Noire's younger sister, is their Mother's favorite, but that for whatever reason, their mother will never have a positive reaction to Noire's presence.

Emotional deprivation is defined as, "extreme detachment of feelings and may result in the child feeling inadequate, inept, uncared for, self-worthless," and emotionally abused children hide how they feel to avoid incurring additional scorn (Clark, *Parenting 416*, *How to Raise a Child* 5-7). Noire never

## THE PSYCHE OF NOIRE: ERA OF BLACK

### Introduction

When writing this novel, I aimed to make the characters are psychologically accurate as possible and this is what will be highlighted in the following paper. Psychological criticism has several approaches, but I will be analyzing a fictional character, the main character of the novel,

using psychological evidence linked to verbal, emotional, physical, and psychological abuse. I will be focusing on the main character, Noire, in regards to three major relationships in her life: 1) her relationship with her mother, Akane Meringue; 2) her relationship with her father, King Colbert Meringue, with specific focus on his toxic masculine behavior; and 3) her relationship with her sister, Blanche. All of these add to the psychological decay that Noire experiences throughout the novel that causes her to break at the end of the novel.

### **Noire's Relationship with her Mother**

The book begins with a scene that will reoccur throughout the book:

“Again, my mother was under a parasol held by a servant, keeping the hot midday sun off her face, sipping tea with mint leaves nestled at the bottom, watching Blanche with a smile, but she would never do the same for me,”

(Karabasz, Excerpt 3).

Not only does this address that Blanche, Noire's younger sister, is their Mother's favorite but that for whatever reason, their mother will never have a positive reaction to Noire's presence. Emotional deprivation is defined as, “extreme debasement of feelings and may result in the child feeling inadequate, inept, uncared for, and worthless,” and emotionally abused children hide how they feel to avoid incurring additional scorn (Stark, Prevost 416, Horton, Cruise 5-7). Noire never receives attention from her mother and any behavior that has emotional charge for Noire is shut down like when Noire shows her mother a spell, her mother ignores it (Karabasz, Era of Black, Full Book 44) or when Noire attempts to soothe her mother after King Colbert burns her mother's hand (Karabasz, Era of Black, Excerpt 7). Behavioral indicators of child abuse whether physical, emotional, verbal, or neglect come with clues. For example, the child refusing to eat adequate

amounts of food; being unable to perform normal learned functions for a given age like walking and talking; exhibiting developmental delays, particularly with verbal and nonverbal social skills; displaying anti-social behavior like aggression, behavioral disruption, bullying others, or delinquent behavior like drug abuse, vandalism; or the child is abnormally unresponsive, sad, or withdrawn; constantly seeks out and other adults, such as teachers or neighbors, for attention and affection; displaying exaggerated fears and is apathetic, withdrawal or lacks real responses to human interaction are all indicators of child abuse (Stark, Prevost 385-38, Horton, Cruise 31-32). If it were not for Noire's sister, Blanche, Noire would exhibit all signs of an emotionally deprived child. Noire refuses to eat often, she bullies other kids when she visits Taikiyama, when she is not with Blanche or in lessons she is away from people, she starts doing drugs to numb out her mind; Noire's touch and love is limited to Blanche (Karabaz, Era of Black Excerpt 17, 22, 27) and this physical touch and love from Blanche is what keeps Noire from going over the edge.

The next time we meet Noire's mother, Akane, she addresses her husband, King Colbert:

"I watched as my mother stood up, stiffly, like a doll, my father's doll, but she was clever, I will give her that. She pressed lightly against my father's side and whispered something in his ear. His eyes flashed at first in anger but then softened, then cleared his throat, "There will be a change of plans. Noire, you will come with me. Blanche, you will be trained by your mother," (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpts 4)

Not only does this foreshadow the toxic masculinity of their father but it shows that whatever Akane said to King Colbert ultimately saved Blanche from working with both her Father and any of his Sages. Noire is left unprotected by her mother, and not even considered. Her

mother choosing only to save Blanche from King Colbert's wrath by suggesting she teaches Blanche magic, light magic though not specified in the excerpt then, but leaves Noire to defend herself ultimately against her father and his Earth Sage, Timberone, who becomes her teacher for Earth magic. Later, the toxic masculinity and physically abusive character of King Colbert is revealed after he grabs Akane's hand and begins to burn her with fire magic, her wit being the only thing that saves her. Afterward, Blanche brings their mother water to help her perform a healing spell on their mother. Noire is unsure of how to help so she pats her mother's back, perhaps trite in Akane's eyes, and Akane responds to Noire with a glare with "more fire in her eyes than my father could wield," which sends Noire back to her room to hide and cope with the emotional pain of Akane openly rejecting her love. (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 6-7)

The next major scene includes the death of Blanche's dog, Goldie. After Goldie accidentally knocks Blanche into a rose bush, cutting her up with the thorns, their Father, commands Blanche to kill the dog for hurting her. Noire quickly raises a shield of earth to protect Blanche from a fire spell. To distract King Colbert from his anger towards Noire for saving her sister, Noire humanely ends the dog's life, which does save her sister and herself. However, it seems at the time that Akane cannot forgive Noire for killing the dog, which is not the case, and her reaction afterward seems to allude that Akane would rather have had Noire die than the family pet:

"I watched my mother cradle my sister and glare at me as she walked away with Blanche... My mother... her glare... What did she... think...? That I wanted to kill Goldie?! I did it to save Blanche! And myself... was I supposed to have died after saving Blanche... Had I done the right thing? I was a half-hearted hero... Could

save Blanche and myself but not the dog, makes me a monster,” (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 9-10).

Only before Noire's mother's death, does she figure out why her mother despises her but first, Akane mocks Noire after failing to say I love you without hesitation (Karabasz, Excerpt Era of Black 23-24). Not only does Akane fail to say I love you without any hesitation but she proceeds to mock Noire by being there, treating her as if she is simply another version of King Colbert by mentioning her turned back though understandable as her daughter was sent to kill her. She mocks Noire for being hurt that she is not her mother's favorite and her mother confirms in this dialogue that Blanche was her favorite and “always will be,” and most heartbreakingly, she mentions Noire's Sorcerer's seal, knows Noire had no choice, and how Noire, a 6-year-old at the time, Noire had not been specific enough in her bargained end of the Sorcerer's Seal.

Noire is the result of Akane's rape by King Colbert and Noire is a constant reminder of her rape by King Colbert, the murder of her original husband, and the murder of her son by her original husband, Maasaki. Noire discovers this when she uses dark magic to her mother's original wedding ring which Akane freely offers to Noire to give her the explanation of why Akane has never seemed to love Noire. Their strained and perhaps non-existent positive relationship is further highlighted by the fact Noire has no idea how her mother likes her tea (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 24-25).

#### Noire's Relationship With Blanche

As soon as Noire returns from seeing her mother's history, she finds her mother dead in a chair. The “sugar” Noire had put in Akane's cup was poison, and Noire unwittingly assisted her mother in suicide (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 24-26). Perhaps this proves after all that her mother loved her, as she had Noire put the poison in her tea and her Sorcerer's seal command was



to kill her mother and Noire unwittingly got the job done. Or perhaps, it was nothing more than Akane choosing to kill herself rather than try to escape as the poison had already been set on the table.

Though Noire's mother was unnecessarily cruel to her: rejected her affections continuously throughout the book, planned to go vacation in Taikiyama without her (Era of Black Full Book 86), ignored her when she tried to show off what she had learned after Blanche (Era of Black, Full Book 38), and continuously called her names, Noire still loves her and Akane does love her which is shown at the very last chapter of the first book:

"I raised my hand over a shard of porcelain from the teacup I shattered, the head of a chimera in silver decorated the piece. I slid the piece over my skin to prove I was alive. The red liquid dripped to the floor, I felt my mother's ring warm against my skin, and the cut healed. I curled my lip in irritation and cut again, only to have her light magic heal me over and over," (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt, 49-50.)

Perhaps her mother originally meant to give the ring to Blanche before she committed suicide but it does not change the fact that in the end, Akane gives the ring to Noire. A ring that is embedded with the light magic Akane knew how to use. A ring embedded with a mother's love that refuses to let Noire physically maim herself even after her mother's death.

### **Noire's Relationship With Blanche**

The only continuous positive relationship Noire has had is with her sister, Blanche. Blanche being Noire's foil, she is optimistic, easily excited about new discoveries, kind, happy, and she is a reflection of what Noire could have been had the situation been different. The first

clue to their relationship happens when Goldie accidentally pushes Blanche into the rose bush thorns:

“I looked up to see Blanche crying, and from what I could gather Goldie had knocked her down and she had scratched herself up pretty badly in the white roses' thorns. I ran over to her to help her up out of the bush and asked if she was okay. She wiped away a tear, and blubbered out a yes, I gave her a hug,” (Era of Black, Excerpt 9).

Blanche is the only physical love she feels throughout the novel. As seen in this excerpt, Noire is able to hug her sister, something she would not dream of trying with her mother or father. The other clue to how close they are comes from the fact Noire knows exactly how Blanche likes her tea, choosing to do it herself other than asking the servants to do it. She wants the tea to be perfect for her sister. Not only that, but Noire knows which tea not to choose, mint, even if Noire personally likes mint herself (Era of Black, Excerpt 9).

The next time they, Noire and Blanche, are together in the excerpt their Father used a spell on parchment paper to draw cuts on Noire. Blanche finds Noire in her room, crying, “So I sat on my bed and cried, my arms limp and in pain from the cuts,” (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 17). Blanche stays though Noire tells her to go and heals her though Noire does not cope well with her emotions and takes it out on Blanche. Noire also chooses to lie where she got the cuts. One could argue that Noire was ashamed of how she got the cuts, but it could also be argued that she did not want Blanche to know in order to keep Blanche oblivious to the situation and in turn, keep her the happy Blanche she is. Most importantly, they say the three words Noire will never hear from either of her parents from Blanche, “I love you.”

Noire Before Noire decides to disobey her father and not kill her mother, fully expecting her own death, she makes sure to see Blanche to at least tell her that she loves her (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 23-24). As is characteristic of Noire, she lies to Blanche as to what truly is happening, prolonging any grieving Blanche would have for her as long as possible by saying she will be spending the rest of the day studying with Timberone as well as lovingly teasing her sister about her obsession with plants. And as is characteristic of Blanche, Noire is the first she wants to show her magical prowess and progress to and will always give the hugs Noire desperately needs. And as is characteristic of them both, neither will leave each other's presence without first saying I love you.

Their relationship involves a lot of tea and when Akane commits suicide aided by an unwitting Noire, tea is what Blanche brings to soothe Noire (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 26-27). As like when Noire knew Blanche did not like mint tea, Blanche knows Noire's favorite, bringing her a steaming, if overly sweet as Blanche likes it, cup of Earl Grey tea and Noire never tells her that Blanche makes the tea too sweet for her taste to avoid hurting her feelings. Again, they say I love you, hug, and Blanche instigates holding her hand as they mourn their mother's death together. Even in the midst of the sadness, with Blanche's presence and love, she is able to crack a joke about wanting mint tea, which Noire does like but Blanche despises. They need each other more than ever, and Blanche now has lost her only other safe space, her mother. And that moment of happiness, even if small, disappears once Blanche leaves the room.

After Noire is commanded to kill Blanche and Gris, the child of Constitina, King Colbert's new queen, and King Colbert, Noire tells Blanche to flee with Gris to Takiyama for safety. During that time Noire successfully kills off her Father, ending the Sorcerer's Seal early, and freeing her from the command to kill Gris and Blanche. However, Taikiyama refuses to allow

Noire to see Blanche physically for years, but Noire never stops pleading with Taikiyama's Council to let her see Blanche (Karabasz, *Era of Black Full Book* 186, 245-256, 312). Eventually, news comes to Noire that her sister has been murdered and not only that but Taikiyama has blamed Noire for the murder. In order to spare lives, Taikiyama proposes a Gani Ikan, a fight to the death between two skilled warriors that emerged from their feudal era under Emperor Ryuu Yamato, meaning Great Dragon. Noire accepts and is sure that the Council has hidden Blanche and are simply trying to kill Noire through the Gani Ikan to right the wrongs of Friandises, King Colbert's and Noire's kingdom. Noire is convinced that after this fight, Blanche would be home back with her in Friandises (Karabasz, *Era of Black Excerpt* 36).

After Noire successfully kills their warrior, Noritama, Noire's love for Blanche takes an unhealthy turn. She tells the rest of Taikiyama's army that if their Council fails to produce Blanche in the next six hours, she will lay waste to the Kingdom of Taikiyama (Karabasz, *Era of Black Excerpt* 42). During those six hours, she not only has to bury her familiar, a wyvern named Aster, but she attempts to trace where Blanche has gone, having to sacrifice the only object she had left of Blanche's to complete the spell, a hairbrush with the design of a unicorn rearing to stab an apple in the branches of an apple tree. Her regret overwhelms her momentarily (Karabasz, *Era of Black Excerpt* 43-44). The spell shows Noire the last three days before Blanche's supposed death, the spell cuts out just as Blanche asks someone who they are and what they want. Noire desperately drinks the potion obsessively to figure out what happened, her obsession becoming a crazed need to find Blanche. Once the potion is finished, Noire hurls the teacup against the wall smashing it in her frustration. Even with Philip, a loyal servant; her Sages; and her General, Tayr; telling her declaring war on Taikiyama would result in unnecessary bloodshed for only one

person, Noire refuses to back down against everyone's better judgment. Noire begins to psychologically spin out of control (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 45).

Even though she is fully aware she is spiraling out of control, she does nothing to stop it. Her desire to have Blanche there in Friandses, to have the only person left alive who loved her by her side again, is stronger than logic. She kills Shemen without a second thought, using fear to control the Sages as did her Father before her. She becomes the very thing she had fought to never become, her Father.

### **Noire's Relationship with her Father**

Noire's relationship with her mother may have been painful in regards to neglect and verbal abuse but it was nothing compared to the physical and psychological abuse provided by her father, King Colbert. Physical abuse comes in several different forms: Hitting, punching, kicking, shoving, choking, slapping, poisoning, burning etc you; using weapons to inflict harm or threaten you; controlling what you eat or when you sleep; forcing you to do work against your will; forcing you to use drugs or alcohol and stopping you from seeking medical treatment or calling the police," (Horton, Cruise 1-2). King Colbert does all of the above except two. He never poisons Noire and he never forces her to drink or do drugs. Noire does drugs of her own accord to cope, even if poorly, in the situation in which she has been placed.

In regards to psychological/emotional abuse, the following applies, threatening to hurt you, your loved ones, your pets, your children, or your possessions; controlling the time you spend with others, or monitoring where you go; controlling what you wear 4) Damaging or stealing your belongings, blaming you for the abuse, saying that you deserve what happens or that you instigated the problem and gaslighting, i.e. saying things to make you question your

perception of reality (Horton, Cruise 5-8). King Colbert again does every single one of the above other than damaging and stealing her belongings. He even controls what she wears though in the excerpt it is not specifically stated as soon as Noire tricks her father into killing himself she “changed out of my [sic] ridiculous, frilly dress, and curved blackened metal to my [sic] body for armor. I [sic] breathed out, "Much better." I [sic] slipped on steel-toed boots, and raised my [sic] hair into a slick ponytail, then walked to the throne room,” (Karabasz Era of Black Excerpt, 32).

Like all the relationships Noire forms, her's with her father begins, for the reader, in the garden as well. When King Colbert is introduced, Queen Akane is anxious, for understandable reasons and the first thing King Colbert says is:

“It's time to be learned in the ways of magic. Without magic, you are without power, and without power, you are weak, and if you are weak you will have no way to defend what is rightfully yours," He gestured to the wide, stretched out land... "Your kingdom," (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 3).

Right up front, King Colbert will associate magical prowess and ability to determine strength. It seems a simply stated fact at first before we meet his character but the abusive to follow is heavily foreshadowed.

The next clue to King Colbert's abusive behavior is when Noire is afraid to choose the wrong element. She purposely chooses to not choose fire otherwise she will have her father as her teacher but knows not to be stupid enough to choose water. It is mostly used for healing and she knows by this scene not to choose an element that is not destructive. Sweets and Sound as her element are not even an option as King Colbert does not provide a way to choose those elements. Noire herself goes on to say that she could handle one punishment from her father for choosing

the wrong element but would not choose fire as she could not handle the continuous punishment she would receive if she allowed her father to become her teacher (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 3-5). The fact that King Colbert would be her mentor in magic versus one of his fire Sages implies one or two things. Either a) he does not believe that his Fire Sage will do it right, or B) assumes he is best at fire magic in general which either one leads us to assume he has haughty and arrogant personality. Noire's fear is apparent when she comes back from choosing her element, earth, and her sister Blanche is using water magic, but Noire is more worried that she will be punished because she has not learned any spells yet. Her sister has already learned to water plants with magic and already has her wand (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 6).

Noire's father acts differently than Noire expects. He grabs her Mother's wrist and begins to burn her hand in punishment for letting Blanche choose such a "weak element" (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 6). Part of Noire's psychological decay happens then. After her mother rejected her assistance, Noire screams, "I'm not! I'm not!" while knocking a pile of books to the floor (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 7). Noire may not realize what she is claiming what she is not at the time, but it suggests she is proclaiming she is not like her father. However, by the end of the novel, Noire became what she despises about her father.

The garden scene would repeat but this time, it would be King Colbert commanding Blanche to kill Goldie for accidentally knocking her into the white rose bushes and her refusal compels King Colbert to potentially kill his own daughter, sending a stream of fire that Noire manages to deflect just barely. King Colbert ordered a child to kill her sister's pet and when Noire disobeys the command proceeds to try and maim or potentially kill her. He is proud of Noire and immediately calms down once Goldie has effectively been taken care of. Noire could not stand back and let her sister die but as soon as she protects her sister, she is in danger of dying, and she

uses the only scapegoat to save them both, by killing the dog. One, this is a man not afraid to hurt or potentially kill his children, two, he has no tolerance for mistakes even by less sentient creatures, and three, he immediately swings back and forth between being happy and furious too quickly. As soon as his initial request is completed, he calms down. All of which definitely does not help contribute to Noire's psyche or create a safe home environment. His quickness between happy and furious is what is dangerous. Noire has continuously lived on the edge of death. Even when she tries to back out of agreeing to a Sorcerer's Seal, her imminent sense of rejection of his proposal puts murder in his eyes and so Noire changes what she is going to say, that instead she simply does not like the terms of the agreement and tries to cover everything she can think of for someone who is six years old though she ultimately will fail to protect most of the ones she loves because of her inability to escape the Sorcerer's Seal (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 12-13).

The dark magic he later makes her perform is horrific: being able to steal memories and distort them, place your wounds on another person, control their mind etc. Noire not only is pushed to her physical limits and past them, like working so hard she never sleeps well both due to work and anxiety caused by her father. She is pushed passed her emotional limits by having to steal more Earth power from Lily, having to murder/execute people of her father's choosing, being ordered to kill the ones she loves, and having to resort to her father's means of getting what she needs or wants (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 13-14). Her father puts her in positions where she needs to take care of herself in order to stay alive, for example, her waking up in a cage with a manticore and her father expecting her to kill it or die or when Noire asks for help with Timerone's sexual advances. Noire later tortures and murders Timberone when he attempts to rape her since her father does nothing. She is forced to embed her earth magic to dark magic in

that is when King Colbert tells her he is proud of her



order to keep herself safe, becoming one step closer to being like her father (Karabasz, Era of Black Full Book 78, 133).

Noire's father is concerned with two things: making Noire "strong," and that she obeys without question. Typically, he achieves the latter with physical punishment (Karabasz, Era of Black 16-17). King Colbert enjoys her suffering. He laughs when he forces Noire to submit to his will, it does not matter that he caused another human, and his own daughter, an incredible amount of pain. His only advice is for her to obey for her life to go a lot more smoothly. And for poor Lily, the girl Noire was forced to take her magic from, later is raped by King Colbert but Noire is not surprised by this then uses it to her advantage by changing Lily's memories in order to try and kill her father (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 19).

Eventually, Noire's spirit seems to be broken. She lost the one person she loved and loved her back, Sigmund, from the Kingdom of Greyhawk. She was commanded to kill Sigmund but he ends up killing himself so she would not die by the Sorcerer's Seal. After this, her Father commands Noire to smile, taking pleasure in her grief as he did with the death of her mother as well. His reply then holds true for the rest of his reign, "When you're King you can do anything," (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 21). He tries to convince Noire the only way she can be strong is if she has no sympathy and loves nothing (Karabasz, Era of Black 22). He orders Noire to kill Blanche and Gris, her mother, her lover, and countless other to desensitize her to death but in the end, it only desensitizes her to the death of people she does not care for (Karabasz Era of Black Excerpt 27).

When Noire pretends she has given in and is willingly ready to kill Blanche and Gris, that is when King Colbert tells her he is proud of her

"Soon you will have no competition for the throne," He spoke, "I'm proud of you, Noire. I was afraid you were weak but you have driven weakness from your body." My body tingled," (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 29).

But as quickly as he gives her praise, he mocks her, telling her she is not smart enough to defeat her though he does end up taking his last breathe by his own unwitting hand by drinking wyvern poison which proves to be both poisonous and venomous (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 29).

Even though King Colbert had been the main abuser in her life, he also has been the most encouraging of her studies and position in life throughout her life. When a boy from Taikiyama says she cannot do something because she is a girl he tells her that gender is irrelevant when it comes to power and that no one should be able to convince her otherwise (Karabasz, Era of Black Full Book 61). He is also bent on making her "strong" as in feeling nothing for others is due to his own past sufferings manifested into his twisted obsession for Noire to not suffer in the same way.

### **Conclusion: Psychological Decay**

Noire becomes the same tyrant in the end as her father: killing unnecessarily or when they do not get what they want, torturing or creating hell for their subjects, and caring only about what they themselves want. But how? The reasons on why it happened are apparent as is her psychological decay, though slow. At the beginning of the novel, Noire is gentle and remembers her manners saying thank you to servants as well as please (Karabasz, Era of Black Excerpt 8). But slowly she stops saying so, losing her manners and abusing those around her to seem "strong" to her father as well as over-working herself trying to impress her father (Horton, Cruise 33-35) At page 51, almost the end of the book, Noire demands the tea, "Mint tea, no sugar." She never

started with healthy coping but had attempted to progress with it leading up to the moment she is commanded to kill her mother by King Colbert. She calmly explains to her mother that even if they never got along, she still loves her (Karabasz, *Era of Black* Excerpt 24) but any hope of that healthy coping is taken away as soon as she no longer can see Blanche.

Noire turns to Tsilberry leaf again due to her inability to see Blanche, a drug that numbs out emotional feelings so she can drown out the horrible things she has done to people both when under the Sorcerer's seal and by her own hand (Karabasz, *Era of Black* Excerpt 50). People who have been abused in real life often turn to drugs as well, "As many as two-thirds of all people in treatment for drug abuse report that they were physically, sexually, or emotionally abused during childhood, research shows," (Swan 1). Dr. Najavitis and her colleagues found that women with, "a history of trauma independent of PTSD is even more common... in drug abuse treatment. The reviewed studies show that from 55 percent to 99 percent of these women reported a history of physical or sexual trauma. Most of the trauma occurred before age 18 and was commonly related to repetitive childhood physical or sexual assault. When the women are victims of both types of abuse, they are twice as likely to abuse drugs as are those who experienced only one type of abuse," (Swan 10). Noire has come in contact with both. Her father abusing her physically, her mother abusing her psychologically through neglect, and Timberone, sexually harassed her and later attempted to rape her (Karabasz, *Era of Black*, Full Book 149). It is the combination of the relationships Noire had with her mother, father, and sister as well as her failure to stop herself from being the monster she wished to avoid becoming, that drive her psychological decay. The emotional, physical and mental abuse set the stage for her unhealthy obsession with finding and bringing Blanche back. In the end, she loses all will to live. Noire's lost everything important: her love, a stable home, her familiar, friends, her reputation of being different than her father and

Blanche, the one person Noire thought could help her be happy and feel loved again and with Blanche, build a better kingdom together. The loss becomes overwhelming along with the overwhelming desire to die, the crystalline chrysalis taking over her body in the end.

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THE PSYCHE OF NOIRE IN ERA OF BLACK

by

Haley Karabasz

A Thesis Submitted to the

HONORS COLLEGE

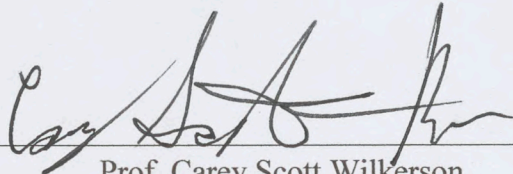
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for Honors in the Degree of

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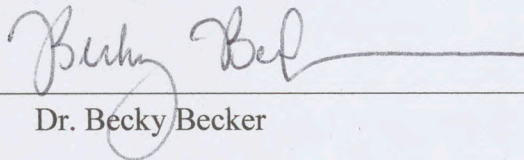


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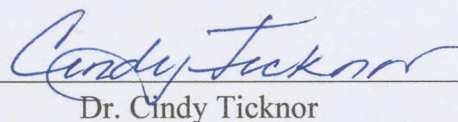


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