

## [Adam C. POV]

"Do you really think they are around here?" Mavis muttered, tilting her head, as we walked through an abandoned town.

"Possibly," I replied.

Today I was on a quest to capture a criminal known as Yelema the Walking Grave dead or alive. Nothing much, just a regular S class mission I had taken to waste some time.

The Town in question was quite a sight. According to the information I had about this place, the once vibrant town had been abandoned over a decade ago due to unknown circumstances.

In that time, Nature had begun to reclaim what was once hers, as ivy and wild vines snaked their way across dilapidated buildings, holding onto crumbling bricks and decaying wood with a stubborn tenacity.

In certain areas, trees had sprouted through the worn-out cobblestones, their branches casting long, haunting shadows in the pale moonlight.

The town's main square, which appeared to have been at one point a place where its former residents could engage in their day to day lives, was now a carpet of overgrown grass and weeds.

The skeletal frame of a rusting fountain stood in the middle, a ghost of its former glory. The stone benches lining the square were chipped and worn, their surfaces stained and faded by countless seasons.

"I wonder what made everyone leave," Mavis whispered as we continued our slow trek through the center of the town.

"I don't know," I replied.

I honestly couldn't find a reason as to why everyone had mysteriously left this place. It didn't look like a monster had attacked the place, nor it looked like they had been raided.

In fact, considering no one had been here for a decade the place seemed in pretty good shape.

Empty market stalls lined the edges of the square, their tattered roofs swaying gently in the breeze. Further beyond lay an abandoned church, its once proud steeple now a silhouette against the moonlit sky. The stained-glass windows, though cracked and weather-beaten, held onto fragments of their colorful past.

From within the church, I could feel something pulse in a very familiar manner.

I hadn't been able to feel it until now. Whoever was hiding there, was pretty good at hiding their energy.

They had managed to keep their presence hidden until I was but a few lengths away.

I smiled. "Someone's there."

Mavis shot me a glance, curiosity glinting in her eyes. "Do you think it's the target?"

That was a hard question.

All I knew was that the church, while abandoned, radiated a mysterious energy that pierced the stillness of the night. The energy didn't feel hostile, but that alone didn't say much, after all, not all enemies carry an evil intent.

But, if I had to describe what I was feeling, I would have to say that it felt like the echo of a forgotten past that the wind carried from somewhere far away.

It didn't feel human.

It didn't feel demonic.

It didn't feel godly.

It felt familiar, but not enough at the same time.

"Only one way to find out," I replied.

Deciding the best course of action was to check the place to see for myself, I ventured closer, my boots crunching over the carpet of leaves that had accumulated in the silent years.

Despite its weather-beaten exterior, the church door stood firm, its wood groaning slightly under the weight of my hands as I pushed it open.

Inside, the church was a mix of both decay and preservation. Pews lined up in neat rows, coated in a thick layer of dust, and an old altar at the far end, its golden cross tarnished but still upright.

Intricate murals on the walls and ceilings were faded but still held remnants of the message they once boasted. The stained-glass windows cast a kaleidoscope of broken colors on the stone floor, illuminating the dust particles dancing in the air.

"Can we skip the part where we play hide and seek?" I said, the hint of a smile playing on my lips.

As soon as those words left my mouth, something changed, and energy within the church started to grow stronger, in a feral-like manner.

It almost seemed like the church was now holding its breath, waiting. For what, I wasn't sure, but it made me all the more interested to get to the bottom of this mystery.

Taking a deep breath, I focused my senses, scanning the room, following the energy to its source as I moved around the church.

It was then when I noticed it. A small, dark form tucked beneath the wooden podium at the front of the church.

As I approached, the form moved, revealing itself to be a small bird. Its ebony feathers glistened in the shards of moonlight streaming through the stained-glass windows.

I blinked in shock, befuddled at the fact that this little critter seemed to be the source of the energy I had been feeling.

It cocked its head to the side, regarding me with intelligent, wary eyes before squaring its stance and opening its wings wide in a defensive posture as it began to peck at the air in my direction, a warning for me to keep my distance.

"Hi there little guy," I whispered, as I knelt down to its level, extending a hand. Scared, and angry, the little one pecked at

my fingers, the tiny stabs doing little more than scratching the surface of my skin.

"Adam, you're bleeding," Mavis muttered, pointing at the small droplets of blood on my hand. I could tell from the tone of her voice she was having a hard time processing that such a small critter had been able to hurt me.

I'll be honest, I was as surprised as her, maybe even more.

Smiling at the little bird, I retrieved a small piece of dried meat I had been saving for a snack and extended it towards the bird with my other hand.

"It's alright," I murmured to the raven, hoping to ease its fear. The raven eyed the offering warily but didn't move to accept it.

I remained still, allowing the raven to adjust to my presence. Patience was key in situations like this, and fortunately, I had plenty of it.... most of the time.

I mean, it wasn't every day you encountered a bird radiating such an intense, unfamiliar energy. The little guy was probably almost as strong as Natsu, and that was a lot, all things considered.

"Magical creatures with immense magical power... Could this be the reason the town was abandoned?" Mavis whispered, more to herself than to me.

I didn't answer immediately, my attention still focused on the critter. But the thought lingered in my mind, adding another layer of intrigue to our mission.

One of these little guys didn't represent much of a problem. But a flock of them? That was more than enough to destroy some kingdoms.

Though if that was the case, where was this little guy's flock?

The critter looked to be a Crow, and those birds were not known for being alone.

More than that. Why was he hiding?

Snapping me out of my thoughts, I noticed as the Crow edged closer, its sharp gaze never wavering from mine. There was a strange intelligence in its eyes that I found fascinating, it almost seemed like I was staring at the eyes of another human.

With a flutter of its glossy feathers, the critter moved its beak towards the piece of dried meat in my hand. Hesitation gave way to trust as it nipped the food, taking it into its beak.

The tension in its body seemed to recede slightly, although its eyes still held a flicker of wariness. It tilted its head, studying me as it nibbled on the food.

Smiling at the small step in the right direction, I kept my movements slow and measured, careful not to startle it. It was a small victory, but a victory, nonetheless.

"Well, that's a first," Mavis commented, a smile playing on her lips. "Who knew you were a bird whisperer?"

I chuckled softly, shaking my head. "I wouldn't go that far," I said. "I just appealed to what most creatures want, food."

Before Mavis could reply, a flicker of movement caught my eye. A second later, a lethal-looking blade sliced through the air with pinpoint accuracy, making its way towards a seeming blind spot.

Calmly, I moved one of my hands to intercept the incoming threat. Catching the blade with just two fingers, keeping the projectile inches away from my face.

"Well, that's just rude," I said, tilting my head back with a faint smile.

At this, the echo of footsteps announced the arrival of the one that had attacked me.

A woman strode into the church, wearing nothing but leather and furs. Her long, dark hair cascaded down her shoulders, and her piercing green eyes regarded us with an icy stare.



Flanking her on either side were two massive wolves without fur, their skin flayed leaving nothing but a gory as they moved in sync with the woman as if bound by an unseen force.

"Apologies for the rude introduction," The woman said, her voice reverberating in the vast emptiness of the church. She held out a hand, a silent request for the return of her weapon. "But the beast you're feeding is mine."

I wasn't the best at reading the lies of others.

But I knew a blatant lie when I saw one.

"Is he now?" I replied, flipping the blade she had thrown at me between my fingers in a playful demeanor.