

## Chapter 4

The morning sun rises over the Nemesian Capital City of Paragon. Within the walls of Castle Verity - headquarters of the Templar Order - the city's knights convene in the main hall. On the wall hangs the duty roster, detailing every knight's assignment for the day. Ike squeezes his way through as many as he can. But when he gets near the front, the way is closed and his view is eclipsed by a number of other Templars, all towering over him. One of them takes notice and elbows his friend with a nod in Ike's direction. "Hey," he says, turning to Ike with a few of his mates.

"Hi," Ike says. And here it is. Every morning, the same old song and dance. Average in height though he may be, there's no denying that average height is... rather short for a Templar. And checking the duty roster every morning serves as a constant reminder. Still, it's a wonder this hasn't gotten as old to anyone else as it has to him, by now. "Um... excuse me."

"Oh, our apologies, mate. You wanna see the board," one of them says. "You need a boost?" The knight and his friends laugh amongst themselves, though Ike is... clearly not amused, if his completely flat expression is anything to go by. Does he even have the energy to be annoyed with this, anymore? Perhaps not.

But a smooth voice slides its way into the exchange. "All right, all right, let him through, will ya?" Huck steps in, stopping next to Ike and bending down, slinging his arm over his buddy's shoulder with an easygoing grin. "A bunch'a bigshots like you guys oughta have the best posts in the whole order, am I right? Best not dilly dally."

The group sneer to one another and disperse, leaving Ike and Huck to the roster. With them gone, Ike lightly knocks Huck's arm off his shoulder and steps forward to finally take a look at the whole reason he's here. "Thanks."

Huck shrugs. "Ah, don't mention it. Now, here. Le'me help you up on my shoulders."

"Cute."

Folding his hands behind his head, Huck puts on a suave grin. "Yeah, I know. That's why I'm so darn popular."

"Right. So, where're you posted, this time?"

"Chapel again. Tellin' ya, bud. Dream job. Nice and relaxed, cute sisters, what more can ya ask for? So how about you? Finally get the post of your dreams?"

Ike runs his finger down the list, searching for his name. Eventually, he finds it... and freezes, a sickly expression coming over him at the note beside it. "Oh no..."

"What's up?" Huck leans over Ike's shoulder and looks over the duty roster, his grin turning sly. He stands upright, tilting his head up and looking down the bridge of his nose.

"Oooh. It appears you've been summoned to the principal's office, Ike... again. Awww. You're in trouble."

"S-shut up! What're you, five? I didn't do anything!"

Huck folds his arms, shaking his head. "Ike, Ike, Ike... that's what they all say."

Ike grumbles beneath his breath and slinks off. "Whatever. I'm... gonna go see what Ramos wants. Try not to die of boredom at the chapel."

Huck proceeds off in the opposite direction, waving over his shoulder. “Oh, don’t you worry about me, buddy. I’ll be just fine. I’ll ask the sisters to pray for you, though. May the goddess be with you, and all that!”

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Ike knocks on the door to Ramos’s office. Upon being addressed, he enters. Slowly. Yet just about every tense thought immediately flies from his mind at what he sees, leaving him just completely floored. There sits Ramos, the mountain of paperwork on his desk somehow bigger than just yesterday, nearly reaching to the ceiling. At this point, the boy could climb it if he wanted. *It multiplied?! But a firm “Ike,”* calls back his attention... and anxiety. “Good, you’re here. I have an important assignment for you.”

The young knight drags himself out of the doorway and over to the desk, across from his commanding officer. “Is it... the children again, sir?”

Ramos chuckles and rises from his chair, walking around the desk. He folds his hands behind his back, standing by the window and looking out over the festivities taking place in the Paragon streets. From here, in one of the city’s highest points, he has a clear view of all the vibrant colors adorning the levels below. Flower displays, carts selling flower-based accessories, petals blowing in the breeze, such a different feeling from the sterile city of hard stone that normally waits beyond that glass. “You’re aware of the occasion, I take it?”

“Yes sir. The Week of Memorial.”

“Correct. A time to reflect on the Creed’s past. Especially... the Uprising.” Ramos pauses, his head bowed. The silence brings, with it, a somberness in stark contrast to the lively festival, just outside. “It’s a bit... unconventional, but the Templars have been asked to open the

Hall of Yore to the public for this year's festival. People will be free to enter and take in the history of the Order, collected over the ages. I'm posting you at the southern exit."

Oh. Guard duty. Again. Of course it was. What else had Ike done since getting out of the Academy? As he continues to listen, the world around him seems to slip away. Ramos is an intimidating man, to be certain. It's only natural that Ike be tense whenever called into this equally intimidating office. But usually there's... something else accompanying that unease. A tingling, bubbling feeling that wells up beside it. Call it anticipation. Enthusiasm, perhaps. People don't get called to Ramos's office for no good reason. There's always that chance. That maybe this would be the day Ramos let him prove himself with a big assignment. But... *Ah. I should've known better than to get my hopes up, huh?*

A sharp "Ike," snatches Ike out of his head, just as it begins to flood with a gloomy haze. Ramos stares back at him, a grave look in his eyes. "The Grand Cleric to the Creed of Eleos is visiting the city for the occasion. She's the one who requested we open the hall, to begin with."

At that, the color returns to Ike's body. And that feeling - the tingling, the bubbling - it begins to creep its way back. "The... the Grand Cleric? The head of the whole Creed? But... doesn't that mean-?"

Ramos nods, turning himself fully around. "Ike. I cannot stress this enough. This is a highly important assignment. Do I make myself clear?"

Ike snaps to attention, his hand instantly coming up over his heart for the Templar salute, his head held high. "Y-yes sir!"

"Good. Dismissed," Ramos says, making his way back over to his desk as Ike leaves.

The door shuts behind Ike and he remains standing there, in the hall. Try as he may to relax his body, he stands stiff as a board. This is it. Isn't it? Not the most glamorous assignment, but... *If it's really that important then this could only be a test, right? And that means if I do well on this...* Ike's hands clench into fists without him noticing and a smile, equal parts nervous and eager, stretches across his face. That anxious energy bubbles over inside and he realizes his body is shaking. *Man... This is no good. I'm getting too excited. But still.* Then, like a volcano, all that energy explodes, sending him rushing off. *This is my chance. I don't plan on wasting it.*

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Later, Ike stands guard by the entrance to the Hall of Yore - a two-level, cylindrical building, housing many of the Templars' most prized possessions and historic heirlooms. He waves as he sends a small group on their way to enjoy the rest of the festivities, having just gotten through with a thorough check of their bags. "Goddess be with you!"

Just as that lot disappears into the bustle of the morning crowd, a cheerful voice catches Ike by surprise. "Oh wow!"

"Hm?" Ike turns his head to find a fair young lady stands in the street, peering up at the Hall with her hand pressed to her forehead, shielding the sky blue eyes that match her dress from the bright Spring sun.

"So this is the Hall of Yore." The girl, probably about Ike's age, smiles at him, holding her hands behind her back. She cocks her head and her pink twin-tails bounce, her white hair ribbons swaying with them. The golden, angel-wing hair ornament in her bangs gleams in the late morning sunlight. Ike... can't help but stare. Of course, it's commonplace for people to dye their hair all kinds of colorful pastels and vibrant hues during the festival. But when this is the

first time he'd seen that it looked so...so natural on someone. And that smile is just infectious.

“It must be pretty amazing, living around all this Templar history.”

Ike blinks, momentarily at a loss for words. When was the last time he'd paid attention to anything in this building? The early days in the academy? Right. Back then, he absorbed all the knowledge there was to gain about this place. Like the eager kid he was. Then the training came. And graduation. Assignment after assignment. So busy. Is that where all his appreciation for it went? Then it hits him. The girl is still standing there, waiting for some manner of response with a curious look about her. Not really able to think of anything to say, he averts his eyes and scratches his cheek. “Y-yeah...”

But then she steps around him, back into his field of vision. “Is something wrong?”

“Huh?”

“You looked upset.”

As if carried in by the Spring breeze, an awkward silence befalls the pair. Ike remains in a deadlock as the inquisitive young lady to his side stares right back at him. Eventually, he faces forward and coughs into his fist. “N-nothing at all, miss. Please enjoy your visit in the Hall of-”

Just then, a shrill noise cuts through the air. “Help! Thief!”

Ike raises his head to find the source of the cry and, just as he does, a man in a cloak dashes by, purse in hand. The response is automatic. Ike moves to pursue, but immediately catches himself. Ramos's words echo in the back of his head and he freezes in place. *If I leave this spot...* The thought has no time to finish as the victim - an older woman - sluggishly appears, pursuing the thief. But she collapses to her hands and knees in front of the Hall, completely out of breath and gasping in an unusually frantic manner. As if choking on the air, itself.

The girl with Ike rushes to the woman's side, kneeling down as a crowd gathers around the scene. "She's having trouble breathing."

Ike's mind races to come up with an answer. Clinic... clinic... no. The nearest clinic, the nearest medical professional, period, is on the other side of the quarter. And with the streets so busy with the festival...

"H-heart medicine... my bag..."

There. Ike grimaces. Then he takes a breath and, with one swift pivot, he's off, leaving the girl there, stunned.

The thief stands in a back alley, looking through the purse he'd nabbed when Ike stops at the alley's mouth and spots him. "Hey!" he shouts, racing down the alleyway to catch him.

"You've gotta be kiddin' me," the thief sners. He reaches into his cloak, pulling out a metal ball. "Okay, Platehead. You want it back? Here, catch!" Ike catches the ball as the thief beams it at him, but the instant it makes contact with his gauntlet, it explodes into a cloud of smoke and the rogue races off, cackling like a hyena.

Ike emerges from the cloud, coughing with his arm over his lower face. "Dirty trick..."

As the thief rounds a street corner, he plows his way through several people, all celebrating the festival. Looking over his shoulder, he finds the young knight coming into view. The last thing he'd wanted to see, no doubt. "Tch. Persistent little..." Focusing on what's in front of him, the thief knocks over a flower stand as he passes by. But Ike leaps over it. Though not the most elegant of landings, he sticks it and continues to accelerate, much to the dismay of the purse snatcher, who shoves people into the path to slow him down.

Ike weaves through people like a ghost, perhaps, for a moment, feeling proud of his experience, slipping around the taller knights to see the duty roster in the mornings since becoming a knight. Once he's through, his eye catches an apple cart, off to the side as the thief begins to pull away. A hurried "Borrow this? Thanks!" zips by the vendor as Ike grabs an apple, winds up, and launches it through the air. Just as the thief turns his head, he's met in the nose with the bright red produce, the sheer surprise causing him to crash into another nearby flower stand as Ike pumps his fist in celebration.

"Good arm," the vendor says as Ike grins.

The thief begins to pick himself up, only to turn back and find Ike nearly on top of him. With a quick look around, he smirks. "Not today, Platehead." Just before Ike can grab him, the thief jumps on top of a nearby cart and bounces from it to the second story windowsill of the nearby building, climbing his way to the roof with the agility of an ape. Once at the top, he takes a bow and runs off. "Later!"

Ike glares up at the criminal, then gives chase from ground level. "I won't let you!"

"Is this kid for real?!" From one rooftop to the next, the thief hops his way along. A grim realization falls upon him as he leads Ike through a number of alleyways and down multiple streets. He's running out of roof. Meanwhile, the young knight doesn't relent. Eventually he turns a corner and the rooftops thin out ahead of him. When he glances down, Ike is nowhere to be seen. Good.

The thief jumps down to the streets with a cocky grin and turns to run off. But the second he spins around, Ike emerges from around the corner ahead of him. The knight holds out his arm as the thief moves too quickly to prevent running directly into it. But that doesn't mean he can't



go under. With a swift motion, the purse snatcher leans back, sliding right beneath Ike's arm.

"Sorry, kid," he says. He looks back at Ike, who turns around to give chase again, only to stop dead in his tracks. "I'm not getting caught today!"

As if on cue, the thief runs straight into a wall of what can only be steel. What else is that solid? He drops to the ground on his backside and whips his head around, looking up at what got in his way. Or, in this case, who. Looming over him may as well be death, himself. Anything is better than the actual answer - Ramos. The Knight Commander glares down at the thief, one hand on his hip and the other holding another, unconscious rogue by the collar. "Care to rethink that statement?" Naturally, the crook throws up his hands.

Then the superior officer's eyes track up from the criminal at his feet. "Ike..." Something about the pleasant way in which he says that name, with a big smile and jovial tone, puts the fear of all ten gods in the young knight. "Fancy meeting you here." All of that goes away in a heartbeat. "But there's something wrong with this picture, don't you think? Now, maybe my memory is failing me in my old age, but... I could've sworn you were supposed to be somewhere else."

Ah. That's about right. The light tone evaporates more and more with every word. The smile fades into a disappointed gaze that cuts to Ike's very soul. All pretense of friendliness drops in a heartbeat. Wait. Heartbeat! Ike darts forward, reaching down and picking up the stolen purse, shoving it into Ramos's chestplate with his head bowed, taking the old knight well off-guard. "Sir, there's not a lot of time! Back in front of the Hall! There's a woman there who needs the medicine in this purse! You can get it there faster than me! You've gotta help her!"

Ramos takes the purse and reaches inside. Sure enough, inside rests a bottle of medicine. The Knight Commander looks to his bowing subordinate and sighs. He cuffs the unconscious crook to a post, then turns to the purse snatcher with a cold look about him. A tap. That's all it takes and the cowering criminal is out like a light, joining his fellow outlaw in being cuffed to the post. Then Ramos looks over his shoulder at Ike as he turns to leave. "My office, Ike. I'll meet you there after I deal with this and take those two in." Then he's gone, disappearing over the skyline with his jump leaving a crack in the cobblestone street where he'd been standing.

Even with Ramos gone, Ike remains bowed, his body still far too tense to move. A sting builds in the backs of his eyes and his body is doing it again. The shaking. But this time is different. It's cold. Weak. And all he can think to himself, in the moment, is that he hates it. He absolutely hates it.

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Ike sits alone in Ramos's office at a perfect ninety-degree angle. He's front-facing, looking dead ahead, probably not even breathing. The door opens behind him and he springs out of his chair across from Ramos's desk, standing at attention. "Sir!"

"Ike," Ramos begins, walking to his desk. He lightly taps Ike on the head with a folder of papers. "Sit." He takes a seat, himself, folding his hands on his desk as staring flatly at his subordinate. Not a single word more.

"Um... is she going to be all right, sir?"

Ramos nods. "Yes. The medicine calmed down her condition and she was escorted to the nearest clinic."

Hearing that, Ike breathes a sigh of relief, releasing all of that air he'd been holding. "Ah. That's good. T-thank you, sir."

Ramos slides the folder across the table to his junior. "Read it."

Ike... hesitantly takes the folder, as instructed. This is probably a termination notice, right? What else could it be? But as he thumbs through it... no. That's not it at all. "M-my academy record, sir?"

"An absolutely glowing report from nearly every instructor you've ever had. Undeniable results and not one instance of insubordination. That would make today a first for you, Ike. Wouldn't it?"

Ike sits forward in his seat. "B-but the purse snatcher-!"

"Was a distraction, Ike."

The young knight's entire demeanor shatters. To a sentence fragment. His vocal chords refuse to produce any further sounds. His eyes glaze over and he sits back in his chair once more. Meanwhile, Ramos stares across the table at him.

"A decoy. One of the thieves was already inside, waiting for a signal to steal one of the artifacts. Their partner stole something outside to get one of the knights away from their post so the inside man could get out with no trouble."

"I... really screwed up."

Ramos turns in his chair. "You nearly did. That woman's heart condition was an unpredictable variable. She was at grave risk without that medicine..." Then he stands, walking around his desk and around Ike, making his way to the door. "Come." He leads Ike out into the

main hall, where the two of them stop at the Wall of Champions. “You’re not in trouble, Ike. The decision you made... it was the right call. Unintentionally.”

“S-sir?”

“Had they been more than petty criminals, they might have tried to steal something dangerous. Something they could’ve used to stir up some real trouble. Luckily, they didn’t.” Ramos peers up at the collection of names engraved in the wall before him. “You know, Ike, I’ve seen this kind of impulsiveness before. I know how it works. There’s something admirable about wanting to help people so badly that you act before you realize what you’re doing. But it’s also dangerous. No matter how well-intentioned, actions have consequences.”

Ike slinks further away. As if trying to do his best impression of an armadillo, curling from the danger. “Sir, I swear it won’t happen again.”

Ramos glances down on the boy through the corner of his eye. “I doubt that, Ike. I really do.” His gaze returns to the wall. “Just to be clear, Ike, had this not turned out the way that it did, you could have been court martialed. And, try as I might, I doubt I’d have been able to defend you.” Ike retreats into himself even more upon hearing this, hiding himself from his superior’s iron-cold gaze. “Do you know what all of these people have in common?”

The young knight cranes his neck to look over all the names. As if by pure habit, his eyes seek out and lock onto Baldrik’s, in particular. “They’re all great, sir?”

Ramos sighs, tipping his head down. “No, Ike. They certainly aren’t all that. Believe me.” He turns to face the boy, hands still behind his back and a cold look upon his face. “Only one of them is Baldrik. And you won’t be the second one.”

Ike locks up as if those last words had punched him in the stomach. His head drops and a grim shadow hangs over him as his eyes seem to sink in. A young voice that he recognizes as his own plays out in his memory, swearing to one day be just like his hero. And now here he is, being told by someone else on that wall with his idol that his dream was unattainable.

After taking the time to collect himself, Ike drags his head up, looking more through Ramos than at him. "Understood... sir."

Ramos stares at him, eventually bowing his head and walking past, moving back towards his office. "For the rest of the day, you're on Chapel duty. Dismissed."

"Yes, sir..."

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Ike drags himself to the Chapel - a structure on the far end of the quarter that, though not comparable to the Grand Cathedral, stands rather tall, with a bell tower and beautiful, stained glass windows. As Ike pulls open the gates and makes his way through the courtyard, he's met with a friendly, familiar voice from afar. "Well, if it isn't my pal, the Great Knight." Ike doesn't lift his head. He knows Huck's voice when he hears it. "What brings a great hero like yourself to my neck of the woods?" Huck takes note of the gloomy aura practically oozing off of Ike and his mirth disappears. "Hey. You good?"

Ike slinks around Huck and up the Chapel stairs, a defeated "I don't wanna talk about it," fumbling from his mouth as he places his hand on the door.

Huck crosses his arms. "What, did you really get in trouble?"

"I don't wanna talk about it, Huck. Just... gi'me some space, okay?"

Ike walks into the Chapel and sits alone among the pews in the back row, hunched over. There aren't many other people around. Possibly because of the festival and the special service over at the Cathedral. This place is nothing but a few clergy sisters and the odd visitor, most likely just looking for a quiet place away from all the festivities to take a break. Though the thing about quiet places is that they only make thoughts louder. And the thoughts swirling in Ike's head may as well be a full blown choir. Those last few words from Ramos just won't leave. They bounce around in there. Endlessly. They just keep getting louder. Louder. Until something silences them. A soft voice from outside of his head. "Excuse me."

The soft voice pulls Ike back to reality and he lifts his head, if only just, to meet it. The girl from before. Standing there with her hands behind her back and that angelic smile. Something in him, perhaps a stray thought from his training, nags at him. Tells him to pull himself together and shake this melancholy. But at the same time... those other thoughts are still there. And they are deafening. "Hi," he finally says, unable to find any other words.

"Is it all right if I sit with you?"

Ike nods and the girl joins him. "Is... there something I can help you with, miss?"

The girl shakes her head. "I just wanted to see if you were feeling all right. I saw you come in and you looked a little troubled." A brief pause slips between them, soon disrupted by a faint laugh, on Ike's part, to himself. Prompting a puzzled look from the girl. "What is it?"

"Templars aren't supposed to let people see them like this. Symbols of hope, and all that. Just more proof that I'm not cut out for this, I guess." A pitying look crosses the girl's face as Ike lowers his head with a forced smile. "It's my own fault for being so unrealistic, though. Trying to be a Great Knight. Ah... what was I thinking?"

The conversation stops and the silence returns to hang over the two of them. Ike hunches over again, his thoughts seeming to grab him by the ankles, dragging him further down into his own head. But then... “I don’t think it’s unrealistic.” Ike’s descent halts, his eyes spring wide open, and he slowly sits himself up halfway, looking to the girl, whose gaze is fixed on the Chapel’s high ceiling. Or maybe some pleasant place in her own mind that only she can see. “I don’t have much experience with the Templars, so I can’t speak for them. But I thought what you did was really admirable. How you acted so fast to save that woman.” Then she turns back to face him and... that smile. “I think you can definitely be a Great Knight.”

Those words hit Ike like a bolt, blowing away his brooding aura in its entirety. His body feels lighter, letting him sit up fully. “You think I can...”

“So don’t give up. Okay?”

Ike... nods. Probably for the best. At the moment, it’s not likely he’s able to string together words in anything resembling comprehensive order.

And, with that, the girl rises. “Good.”

“Hey there, cousin.” Oh no. Ike winces and turns his head to find Amelie standing in the aisle at the end of his row. Plastered across her face is a smug, ear-to-ear grin, aimed squarely at him. But she shelves it for the time being, wearing a more genuine smile as she brings up a hand to greet his new friend. “Hello. Is my cousin keeping you company, ma’am?”

“Oh. Are you with the clergy?” The girl shakes her head, looking around at the Chapel’s gorgeous windows, rows of near-empty pews, and the mural of Nemesis painted across the back. “I just came by because I wanted to see what the smaller Chapels were like, compared to the Cathedral. It’s really beautiful. And I like the atmosphere! It’s homey.”

And now comes Amelie's turn to be at a loss for words. What is this radiant positivity? Is this girl some kind of angel? But she does what she can to shake it off and bounce back. "Uh... t-thank you!" So much for her collected facade. Placing one hand on her hip and rubbing the back of her head with the other, she gives a confident laugh. "We sisters do our best to keep this place in tip top shape, after all!" Despite her boisterous tone tapers off and she glances away.

The girl looks back at Ike. "I met your cousin earlier and wanted to say hello. But I should get going, now. I'll worry people if I'm gone for too long." Then she gives Amelie a respectful nod. "Sorry to leave so suddenly, Sister..."

It takes a minute. Amelie is still in a stupor about this one until she realizes the girl's trying to get something out of her and jumps. "Oh! Ah... Amelie."

The girl shakes Amelie's hand when it's offered to her. "Amelie. That's a pretty name. Mine's Faye." Then she turns to depart. "Well, it's been nice meeting you, Sister Amelie. And you, Sir Ike."

Just as Faye reaches the door, Ike shoots up from his seat. "T-thanks!" Ah. Right. That's how words work. Remembering that as Faye glances back at him, he collects himself. "I mean... Thank you."

Hearing this, Faye's smile doubles in size and she nods, this time with a chipper bounce and a giggle. Then she steps back and gives him a small wave before spinning on her heels and stepping out. "Bye."

Ike catches himself waving back, then lowers his hand once she's gone. "Faye..."

Out goes one, and in comes another, Huck passing her on her way out to join the others inside. With hardly any time between their saying goodbye and the doors closing, Amelie plops



down in the pews beside Ike and elbows him in the arm a few times with a catty grin. “So. She was a real looker, eh? Eh?”

Ike slowly turns to his cousin, giving the girl a flat stare. “What?”

“That she was,” Huck says as he strolls over to the two of them. “Y’know, Ike, you’re gonna start making me jealous. What’s a beautiful girl like that want with a shrimp like-?”

Before Huck can venture to finish that sentence, he finds himself on the receiving end of a brutal headlock, courtesy of Amelie. “Whose cousin are you calling a shrimp, you weasel?” she sneers as Huck struggles to get free.

“Easy, woman! Easy!” Huck chokes. “Joke! It was a joke! Ike, help a guy out, here!”

“Amelie, let him go, will ya?!”

Amelie huffs and releases the knight from her hold. Huck pulls at his collar. “Phew. You’re a lifesaver, Ike. The Chapel almost had to dig a new grave, just for me. I can picture the obituary now. ‘Handsome knight, killed by demon nun.’ What a way to go, right?” Amelie cuts him a glare, which he returns in full, a vicious spark passing between the two pairs of eyes.

Ike scoots back from the bother of them, fully able to feel the murderous intent pouring from the pair. He holds up his arms, meekly trying to calm them down. “At the very least you shouldn’t do this in a holy place! Come on!”

The violent aura passing between the two diminishes almost instantly as they direct their attention back to Ike, Huck folding his arms. “So what’s her deal, anyway?”

“Who, Faye? I dunno. We just met earlier at the Hall of Yore and she saw me come in.”

“So her name’s Faye, huh?” Huck scratches his chin and shrugs., then sends Amelie a sly grin. As sure as they’re mirrored one another glares of pure contempt, they do just as well with

these smirks. “Well, as long as you’re feelin’ better, champ. And don’t worry. We’re rootin’ for ya, buddy.”

Along with Huck, Amelie gives Ike a double thumbs-up and a wink. “All the way!”

Ike... blinks. “What are you two going on about, now?”

Amelie groans and hunches over the back of one of the pews. “Oh my gods, you’re so booring!” she complains.

“Speaking of boring,” Huck says. “Ike!”

“What?”

“You’ve been reassigned here, right? So that means you can take over for me, out front. I’ll tell ya, I’m beat. Guard duty’s serious business, all that standing and watching. I need my beauty sleep. You got my back? Don’t worry. I’ll hold the fort here and watch after the sisters.”

Amelie gives Huck the side-eye as she still hangs over the pews, puffing up a cheek. “Oi. No one’s asking for a useless fake knight’s protection,” she grumbles.

“I’ll bet. You’re scary enough. Hey, if they send you to the Cathedral, they can probably take down the gargoyles.”

The murderous aura reignites as suddenly as it’d disappeared and Ike dives between the two, pushing them both apart. It’s a wonder he’s not lit on fire by the spark between the pair.

“The only thing this place needs protection from is you two!” Soon he grabs Huck by the shoulders, turning him to the door and pushing. “Come on, Huck. We’ve got guard duty.”