

Bara no Konrei

The Vampires' Prelude

Von Flokati

Kapitel 5: The last Refugium

It's the dearest memory of all ... I still believe to have little butterflies in my stomach when remembering the only night we made love to each other. His body was protecting and hot, in my inner eye I see the wet skin and the traces my fingers had left in the act. His eyes looked down at me sincerely and told me he was happy and so was I. Kouji had been right, when he told me that if love was a sin, no matter in which way, something would be incredibly wrong in the world. Since a long time, I had found peace, my body seemed to be lighter than any time before, my muscles had relaxed and whatever woes and worries were lurking outside, it was nothing I took part in; Kouji was all I could think of.

The bells rang midnight. The weather had quieted completely, the night was silent as death.

I was laying next to Kouji in his bed, almost falling asleep under his soft caresses on my sensitive skin, counting the rings of the big bell. I always did when I heard them.

„Mana, will you go back tonight?“ Kouji was muttering in my hair. „Better, ne? They may be searching for you already.“

Shifting a little, Kouji sat up, causing a gentle breeze to let me shiver for a moment.

„I should also go and tell my mother it's everything all right. She's probably still worried.“

He kissed my forehead. „I'll be back right away. Get up and dress, I'll accompany you home.“

I sighed when he climbed out of bed, collecting his clothes from the floor where I had thrown them earlier. He returned to me then, kneeling down so we were on eyelevel.

„My red rose ...“ he whispered, taking my hand. „Your're blooming, so beautiful.“

„I love you, Kouji.“

He smiled and kissed the hand he was holding tenderly, I had said the words to him for the first time.

„I love you, too. I promise I will never leave you, Mana, don't be afraid.“

„Thank you ...“ I spoke quietly and honestly, it was what I felt, it came from the depths my heart. „God will punish us for this and yet, as long as you're with me, I'm tempted to risk it. I have nothing else to lose, I am already a sinner. I will serve God my whole life nevertheless, I believe in his justice and love for the people.“

„Your faith is strong.“ he said, standing up. „Get dressed, while I'll inform my mother.“

I watched him till the door was closed, cuddled for a brief moment in the warm and secure sheets again, enjoying their smell around me. I really had no intention to get

up and dress, I did not want the dream to be over. He came back, he was waiting for me ... focusing me with his beautiful eyes, shimmering like precious rubies, I lifted my body upright to let him take me ...

„MANA!“

My eyes saw clear again. There he was, in flesh and blood, the man that was haunting my and Kouji's dreams, right in front of me, bent over my chest and looking angrily to the door, where I saw Kouji standing. Then his eyes flicked back to me, down on my chest, then to my face.

His eyes flashed red, anger written all over his face, he reached for my neck to strangle me. I panicked, struggling for breath, fighting with all my efforts to get free. If I hit him, kicked him – I didn't care. I knew he was the murderer of Mary and Catherine, he was real and no mere nightmare and he was after me, he had chosen me to be his next victim. Tears shot in my eyes, his grip was so firm on me, that my strength became less ... I was collapsing. Until the pressure on my throat disappeared suddenly and I was shaken.

„Mana! Mana! Open your eyes!“

It was Kouji calling me, I was pulled out of bed by him, standing naked on the floor on legs that didn't support the weight of my body.

„Wrap that around you, quickly!“ he commanded and held out one of the bedsheets. I was too dizzy to realize anything. Kouji did it instead and while he did my eyes opened a little and spotted the man as he was laying on the floor, stabbed with a knife in his back.

„Kouji ... have you ..?“ I asked hardly audible and still in shock, but he didn't answer, just pulled me away from the bed and I nearly stumbled over the edges of the sheet, so Kouji didn't waste much time and carried me again. Out of his room, along the corridor.

„Mana, are your robes still in the bathroom?“

„Yes ...“ My voice was going to fail its job. Kouji had killed him ... he had become a murderer himself to rescue me ... I wished desperately it wasn't true and clinged to Kouji more firmly, my head buried in his shoulder. I was paralyzed, my blood rushing though my head making it feel like exploding any second.

„Mana ... listen to me, listen!“ Kouji called to me and put me back on the ground. I hadn't realized we had reached the bathroom. „I help you dress, ok? Dress, and then we go down to your convent, do you understand?“

I wimmered, but nodded, and he started to unwrap the sheet, throwing it away and then passing me my robe.

„I'll take your corset, we don't have time for that, hurry, please!“

I couldn't manage, my brain still wasn't working properly nor did my arms and legs, Kouji came to my aid and found myself again wearing the black nun's robe. By all the noise we had caused it was no surprise to find the lady outside the living room as we hasted forward to the entrance door.

„Kouji, what is wrong, haven't you-!“

„Mother, I am sorry, I have to leave with Mana, tell them it's me who killed that madman, will you?“ he called to her while hurrying with me, passing her.

„Kouji, what are you talking about?!“

„Don't ask!“

We had reached the door. I was feeling sick by now. He had wanted to kill me and Kouji had killed him. As the door opened, I screamed a toneless scream and Kouji stepped backward shockedly.

He lived. He was alive. But he looked old, his hair grey, his eyes lurking for the pray that was me.

„It cannot be ...“ Kouji stuttered by the sight of the man he believed he had killed. „Impossible ...“

The madman grinned an evilish smile, he was beyond reason, lusting for the satisfaction of his desires.

„By God, who ist that man?“ I heard the lady ask from behind. It was now, that the man noticed her presence, looked behind Kouji and me. Grinning a twisted smile, I understood what he was up to and I knew I would not want to let it happen. But even before I could attempt to block the way to the lady, he had flown in the air, over our heads, there was nothing Kouji and I could have done to prevent it. He rammed her hardly and they fell over, the lady shierking in fear and it had been the last, we had heard from her. Kouji had turned around as well as I, but the lady's voice faded so suddenly, it made us stop all motions.

„Don't move, Mana.“ Kouji commanded and I did, while he took bravely some steps forward. The man's head was bopping up and down slightly, the sound of sucking in the air.

The maid, except of us the only one in the mansion, entered the corridor in her nightgown from the other end, curious because of all the shouting and noise of footsteps. Being able to see what Kouji and I couldn't, she screamed in shock.

„Run!“ Kouji called to her, but she was petrified by her fear. The madman got up, rushed to her as quickly as he had rushed over me and Kouji, reached for her head and the ugly sound of breaking bones told us he had killed her, too ... she fell on the ground lifelessly, her head only centimeters away from that of the lady and her neck broken.

Kouji spun around, grabbed my arm and pulled me out of the house.

„RUN!“

And we ran. It was all we could if we did not want to die. The lady was dead, the maid was dead. Would he come after us again? I ran and ran, down the street, right there where Kouji was leading me. Breathlessly we reached the iron gate of the convent, which was naturally closed. Kouji shook it.

„Damn it!“ he turned to me. „Is there another chance to get in? Mana?“

I could not think. His mother had been killed a few moments ago, killed because she was at the wrong time in the wrong place, or rather, because I had gone to the mansion ... If I had stayed in the convent, just as I should have done, she'd still be alive ... it was all my fault. Kouji rattled again on the gate.

„Oh come on, one of you nuns's got to hear it ...“ he said to himself, impatiently. „Mana, is there a second entrance?“

„I don't know ...“ I stuttered. Every word I said made me feel one step closer to throwing up. Leaning on the wall, I let myself sank to the ground, staring high in the pitch-black sky.

„Mana, it's your home, you've got know!“ Kouji said, in his face was all the worry visible he had. He was wishing desperately for me to be safe, he was endlessly sad and hurt about his mother's death and he was, as I, making himself reproaches for what had happened. Yet he understood that it was no matter of not knowing that I could not tell him, I simply wasn't capable right in the moment. Crouching next to me, he took me in his arms, trying to give me strength.

„It'll be all right ...“

Nothing would be. I knew it for sure. The Devil had given me the chance to abandon

God by sending the lightning in the tree so I could escape and human fool that I was, I followed my perishable desire instead of my faith and ended up right where I was now. Caught between God and Devil, not knowing whether I should be forgiven or forsaken - if there was chance to be forgiven if humans were my judges and the Devil waiting with arms wide open for me. I wanted to pray, pray for the lady and the maid, for Kouji and for anybody else. I had to go to the church, it was like a desperate will burning inside of me, apologize for everything, finding salvation from my conscience, troubles and the illness of my heart ...

„...Kouji ... take me to the chapel.“

„... the chapel?“ Kouji asked me irritated.

„Take me there, please ... please, Kouji.“

The little chapel at the edge of the village, peacefully built in the fields, watching over the town and its inhabitants. The last refugium I could think of. The church, the convent, the mansion, they all had already been struck by the Evil and splattered with innocent blood.

Kouji helped me to get up.

„I trust you. Whatever you seek there. We have nowhere else to go, either. Let's go, Mana.“

Taking my hand, we walked quickly to the chapel, our last common way as humans. My heart ached with every step, the awareness of what lay ahead was terrifying. Kouji still seemed not to have realised it ...

We reached the chapel after some minutes' footwalk, maybe. I knew its door was not locked by a key, so we got in easily and stood directly in the aisle on the red carpet, facing the stone cross at the opposite side. I asked Kouji for my cornet and put it on.

„You're solemn.“ Kouji stated. I eyed him suspiciously.

„Kouji ... do you believe in God?“ I asked.

His face gave me the impression of having surprised him with that question. He did not answer right away, he was doing some thinking about whether he did believe or not.

„Mana, I think you expect that my faith is not as strong as yours.“ he started. „And by looking at all that misery and danger going around, I had every reason to deny it. My mother was just killed by a demon in human shape. But I see you. You believe even after this in His existence and I feel it is not wrong. Your resolution also keeps me quiet. I may not believe in God, but I believe in you.“

„You shouldn't.“ I answered, walking slowly with enlaced fingers along the aisle.

„Darkness is longing for me. Heaven offers me strength to endure it. But there won't be salvation.“ I had reached the cross and kneeled down. „Yet, the Devil can only take my body, my soul will not be harmed. I shall believe God will rescue what's eternal of a human being and hell will be satisfied to possess the shape I was given. I have faith.“

Kouji didn't answer. After a while, I heard footsteps behind me and even felt his presence close by, but he did not touch me.

„I adore you. You say it and I am tempted to believe it without even hesitating.“ he spoke quietly to me, but I also recognized that he seemed to have understood by now. „It makes me wanting to cry to hear you are departing from me. Why don't you just fight creating your own destiny, instead of leaving the choice up to others?“

„Destiny doesn't pose the question of leaving up choices. All has its „raison d'être“ and nobody will escape it. So many don't even have the chance to think about it as we do. We should feel privileged, but it doesn't give us any knowledge. Whether we will

fight, run from it or accept it – the result will always be the same. We don't shape our fate, we just create memories the people share when remembering who we were."

If Kouji thought, I would not fight, he was wrong. I did. While I was talking, my hands were trembling, my eyes ready to spill water on my cheeks and my heart was breaking apart. How much more would I have appreciated a normal life at his side instead of these ungrateful circumstances that had lead me to him only to tear us apart even more painfully. I fought with my fear of the coming hours, morning, maybe days. It was now no matter anymore of what, but only of when.

Kouji kneeled down, embracing me from behind. „I cannot accept. I will fight to change destiny as long as I live and even after my death. You don't deserve this. I won't let you die."

A tear dropped and with all my perishing heart, I thanked him for his loving words.

„You look like Maria ... " Kouji whispered. „Knowing you can't turn back, you face your fate, however cruel it might be, but please remember that I am still with you."

„Thank you, Kouji. You have had to suffer so much just because of me..."

He touched my cloth-covered cheek with his lips affectionately and so we stayed for quite a while, my eyes focused on the cross, clearing my mind off and Kouji showing all the love he had with a single gesture.

If God wanted to dispose of me for all my sins, I prayed He would not let Kouji endure this any longer ... he did not deserve it.

I prayed all night long, not moving an inch. My mind and my heart had cooled down and become calm, I would stay here until someone found me. I was ready for everything that should come and what will happen shall be. The morning light illuminated the chapel as if it was becoming a holy place in dawn, so bright I had never seen it before. It was the last time I saw the sun rising. Next to me, I could see now, were lilies, beautifully arranged in a vase. White, lovely and blooming. Bathed in sincere brightness, undeflowered and untouched in their pureness. And yet, they're flowers of death. I was at my own funeral. Whoever had picked them up and put here, it wasn't coincidence anymore. It all would be over when sun would set tonight and I was fading.

I got up slowly from my kneeling position, turning around, only to find out I was alone. Kouji had gone. I turned again facing the cross. It was better this way, he should not pay the price for my disobedience. I did not feel tired, although I had not slept, I did not feel alone, although my lover had left me, I did not feel fear, although my life was ending ... calm, faith, silence of the deads. It seemed, my prayers had reached God ...