

Bara no Konrei

Von Flokati

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Prolog:	2
Kapitel 1: The Beginning	4
Kapitel 2: Rising	11
Kapitel 3: Beware	21
Kapitel 4: Midnight	30
Kapitel 5: The last Refugium	36
Kapitel 6: The Purgatory	41

Prolog:

Bara no Konrei ~ The Vampire's Prelude

C'est une imagination capricieuse comme la nuit. Elle est douce, la rencontre fatale

I watch you. You are sitting on a chair by the window, staring outside. Thunder and lightning break the silence of the night; as if night itself knew, that the time was near for my creator to pick up a new wife. It's like thunder was playing a prelude, as if lightning tried to imitate the human's celebrating fires.

I know your thoughts don't go with the weather. And yet I can guess, where your mind is wandering. Back to the past, when we used to be human. It seems you can not forget about it, maybe the girl reminds you of it. For my part, I haven't either, but I've sealed the memories deep within myself. I still have a task to fulfill, the duty I owe my master.

„Mana ...“ you speak in low voice, turning you head to me. „Why didnt' you let my take her?“

„I told you.“ I reply without emotion. „She's Lord Dracula's virgin bride.“

„And because he says, you'll play along?“

I notice your angry undertone. The same reproaches, again and again. It was you who once tried to save my life, in the end you lost me to the devil.

I raise from my own chair and put the bible aside. „Kouji, we talked about this so often. I do not treat you like my servant, nor do I intend to, although I'd be obliged to do so. That's why you're free. But I am not. The Lord's my creator, as long as he wishes for me to serve, I'll do.“

„As you served God, right?“ you ask, your voice getting bitter.

„I still serve God.“

„He bound you the cross.“

„Humans did.“

„He did not answer your prayers.“

„He did. Else I'd be dead.“

„You are DEAD!“

I stare at you. Your chair has fallen as you got up suddenly. It's not surprising for me to hear you shout at me, it's always been like this when we discussed the very subject. And as every time before, once you've realised you had been shouting, you turn to me, embrace me and bury your face in my hair, that's neither pulled up in tail, nor hidden under a nun's robe. At times like this, I just let it fall as it does. You say you like it best this way.

I allow myself to be held by you, the only way of showing affection that's left for us. We used to be in love, but we lost the feeling. Memories are all we can cling to.

How ironic. You, the son of a noble family in town, I, a nun of the local church. Sad enough, that now I seem to be supposed to be a creature of the devil's seed, although I've always been devoted to God, but believing the damend would allow us our love, while living among humans under God's rights did forbid the feelings we shared, was just as foolish. The demons didn't care, they took all emotions, so why should they bother? We don't even have a conscience.

You only wish you could have spared us from this. You don't regret, because you can't,

but you cannot accept what has been done to us by my Lord Dracula, the one owns me rightfully for being my creator. And you? You were made by me.

I whisper to your ear, soothing.

„Kouji ... what can I do to ease your suffering?“

„You now it ...“ you say, your nimble fingers travelling up my back.

I close my eyes. We've done this so many times. The long dress falls off my shoulders, your cold hands touching my pale, bloodless body. All you do is touch and admire. You always tell me how beautiful I am. The only moments in which I see you in peace.

Your open your blouse, my eyes wander to your neck. I hardly leave the church, even less I leave this house. Chasing humans to satisfy my thirst has never been attracting to me, I only do if I cannot avoid drinking my blood directly from a human.

I peck your lips, the sign for you to get ready and I slide my lips down your chin to your neck. I set my long teeth in your dead skin, sucking the liquid of life from you. It makes you moan with pleasure. This is our privacy, our intimate time. And yet, it has nothing to do with love, it's simply necessary for me to be fed. Reason is a cruel companion, I sometimes even think it's wrong to judge your care with reason. Still, I cannot change it. I cannot even bring myself to appreciate your request, the only one you're asking of me. But I'm not yours, Kouji ...

After my lust for vampire's red whine is satisfied, you help me getting dressed again. The night is still howling for my master's sake, but soon sun will end the choirs of worshipping the count of darkness. For us, it means we've got to go to our coffins, at least I have to, if I want to rest some hours before I'll have to be back in the church again. Maybe the girl comes running to me again, seeking help from her nightmares. Poor girl, if she just knew, that even the sacred place is full of death and a hidehood for the monster that I am. Her faith is strong, but faith alone won't rescue her, now that she's chosen to be part of the forsaken. Not even the boy will achieve it to save her. It's nothing but my own painful experience.

Kapitel 1: The Beginning

Kouji was 22 years old when we met first. I was older. His family had just bought a beautiful mansion up the streets of the village, not far away from where I used to live. Carriages brought all the family's belongings and it was a day full of work, until everything was into place. The people were buzzing through the streets, anxious to see the noble family members, who were hotly discussed after the master's first visit here. Nobles in a small village as ours was something unusual and new for all the habitants. Of course discussions increased rapidly after the master had bought the mansion. I heard a lot of stories. And I didn't believe in one of them. But I have to confess, that even I was curious and wondered if I would see them the next sunday in church after their moving in.

I did, but only the lady and the master, their son did not come along. Guessing that I might knew a bit more about the village and the people, the lady and the master stayed until everyone was gone to talk to me. I still don't know why they had chosen me, for everyone knew I did not talk much.

„It's beautiful in here, I like the windows.“ The first words of the lady, I still remember them. She was right, the windows of my old church were nothing but beautiful. They were surely no masterpiece of art, but they simply fit and they had always such a warm light, even in winter.

„Do the people attend prayer regulary?“ the master asked me. He had a deep and soft voice.

„Not everyone, but most of people here do so. We don't have enough space for everyone, it's so small in here.“

„I see. May I ask your name, sister?“

„Mana.“

„What an extraordinary name.“ he said, scanning me with his green eyes. „Are you feeling well, sister?“

I was used to be asked by people wether I was ill or not. But I wasn't.

„You sound as if you had a cold. We all have to watch our health, this autumn is supposed to become a rough one.“

„I heard about it, sir. Thank you. We should pray to God for our and our children's health.“

„You are gentle.“ the lady said. „And beautiful. Just like a doll.“

The master laughed, seeing my irritated face at that compliment. „Forgive her, sister. My wife speaks what she thinks, no matter how direct it is. But she's got a good heart.“

I smiled shyly. True, the lady was a very good-hearted person as far as I could tell. I remember very well her potraits of all the different people and her generous attitude towards them. The day she died, 2 months after the moving in, I felt a lot of sadness. The master could hardly bear the loss and after he had lost his son some days later, he decided to part from this world to the heavens. At that time, I had already lost my ability to feel compassion.

After prayer and my brief talk to the master and the lady, I went up in the tower of the church were I would always meet with the old man that played the pipe organ for us. He had problems to handle the staircase alone, but his fingers were as skilled as they had been years ago. I liked his playing. Sometimes, he gave me lessons, let me try

to play by myself. He somehow knew he made me happy with it and if I made him happy because he had company, I saw no point in being wrong to meet with him. Great Sister Ann did not like it. She said I should not waste my time to the babbling of an old man, but help my other sisters with arranging flowers, sewing and preparing meals for those who could not. To make up for my visits, I did most of that in the late of the night on sundays, I did not want to deny the old man and myself the company. His wife had died years ago before I became a nun and it seemed that no one really cared for him honestly. His family cared because it was their duty, but it was no secret, that they regarded him as a burden. No one really liked being with him and for that, he didn't have anyone to talk to except me.

The more I was surprised when I saw he wasn't alone that sunday. A red-haired young man was with him and he talked to him. He wore fashionable clothes and was about my height, a little taller maybe. I hadn't seen him before.

„Mana!“ the old man said joyfully once he realised I was there. He always spoke very loud because he was almost dumb and he always called me ‚Mana‘, but I didn't object.

„Good morning.“ I answered politely, „I see you've got already a visitor?“

„Yeah, kind 'o. The young master o' the mansion, he's int'rested in playing!“

I could tell he was happy. He smiled brightly and revealed his rather toothless mouth. My eyes wandered to the young master. He was, no doubt, a very handsome young man. When he faced me directly, I saw the unusal about his hair. The side I saw first, was red and curly, the other was cut short and black.

„You wonder about this?“ he adressed me.

„I wonder about many things. Since you asked, it's your hair.“ I answered, knowing I could backfire such shameless assaults.

„And I wonder about things, too. For example why such a beautiful woman is hiding herself under a nun's robe.“

„Oh Boy!“ the old man exclaimed, chuckling. „You're going to burn yourself!“

He was. A typical, little heartbreaker. My inner eye already saw many of the young ladies in town in tears. But there were more troublesome things then a first, innocent love, I rhought at that time. Today, I wouldn't say so anymore. Kouji was my first love, I have to admit. I never understood the feeling and I can't understand it anymore. The time, in which I was aware of my feelings was to short to grap it entirely. I don't even know if one who's been in love his whole life could ever grap love in all its facettes.

I watched the old man explaining the pipe organ to the young master enthusiastically. By listening, I also got to know his name and asked myself, why the old master thought my name was extraordinary. As if Kouji wasn't just as strange, maybe a little more. By the end of this eplanation of the pipe organ the old man had talked so much that I could hear how dry his mouth must be.

„Sir, it's time. Let's go. You wouldn't mind some water, too, would you?“ I offered him.

„You're 'n angel, Mana.“ he let me know and reached for my hand, so I could lead him down to the ground floor. The young master followed us in silence, but he watched us very attentively. Once the old man had got a goblet of water from me and we had exited the church, I said goodbye to both of them and made my way back to the nun's dormitories to fetch some things for lunch. I needed some time to realise that I was followed by the young master. I turned around, and walked back to him.

„Is there something you'd like to ask me?“ I wanted to know.

„I saw you talking to my parents from up there.“ he said. „Did they say something about me?“

„No, sir.“ I answered honestly, but I was sure this wasn't the reason why he had

followed me. „We just talked briefly about the weather and the town.“

„All right.“ he waited a moment, then: „Are you always at prayer on sundays?“

„Yes.“

„I didn't mean to offend you earlier.“ he said, almost a little unsure. „It's just that I speak quite openly ...“

I had to smile, he was truly the son of his parents. „Don't worry. I'm glad you were there. He had so much fun to talk to you, I'm happy for him.“

It took him a moment to realise I wasn't angry with him and he held out his hand to me.

„My name is Kouji.“

I shook his hand. „I am Mana.“

The days went by, nothing but routine. The daily chatting, the daily worries and the daily schedules. The only thing I had to get used to was the young master, who always greeted me when I walked on by in the streets. The lady hardly left her home, I had heard she was an artist and did paintings and for having such a great garden and an even greater view from the mansion over the area, it wasn't suprising at all. Her husband was always busy, he seemed not to have time for anything during the week. Their son, however, was everyday at leisure. The little heartbreaker on tour, and the girls at his heels.

I hardly got used to strangers, being the quiet and shy nun that I was. Even the other nuns thought I was strange. If they could, they'd avoid me. I didn't care, I appreciated the privacy I was given involuntarily.

Saturday evening, after the bells rang 6 o'clock, I went out to the fields to help a family picking up the apples that were now all of a healthy rosy colour. Even the ones that had fallen on the ground were looked at, everything was valueable. I was in a little hurry, but I arrived in time. The old lady of the house had children, all old enough to help, but only the youngest, Mary, did. She was a pretty, brown-haired girl, young 16 years old.

„Where is Mary? Doesn't she help?“ I asked as the old lady and I collected the baskets. „Oh, she's already on the field. She says she has ‚something to do‘ there, but I know her to well. She'll meet with a friend, I expect.“

„She surely has many friends.“ I said.

„Oh yes, and the boys simply love her. I wonder who will finally be the lucky one?“ she said amused. Surely, Mary was old enough to get married. For a brief moment, I imagined being at her wedding, sealing the will of a young couple to share life together in the name of God. I saw her happy.

„Sister,“ her mother adressed me, interrupting my thoughts. Her voice had become heavy. „Mary wants to talk to you. But she wouldn't say what's the matter.“

„To me?“ I was surprised, but I did not show. „Yes, of course. She's welcome to come and see me.“

„Thank you. I'll let her know.“

„Thank God.“

„No, thank you.“ she insisted. „You are such a good soul, think once a little bit more about yourself, will you?“ She laid a hand on my shoulder, looking as gentle as a mother does when in worry about her children.

„I'll try.“ But truly, I did not know what to reply to this. Silently we walked up the path the fields with the baskets under our arms. When Mary saw us coming, she launched into a run, her long hair bouncing up and down.

„Good evening, sister!“ she greeted me, then took the baskets from her mother. „I'll take them for you.“

„Good evening, Mary.“ I greeted back, but something else had already caught my attention. I saw another figure emerging from the place where we had spotted Mary first and no doubt it was a man. Her mother also had noticed the man in the distance, apparently waiting for us to come up.

„Oh!“ Mary exclaimed laughing, seeing where her mother and me were looking.

„Mother, I have to introduce you to someone.“

„Mary, who is it ...?“ her mother said, a little startled by her own thoughts, but I exactly thought the same. Thinking about wedding. The images jumped to my mind again and I was about to ask her, when I recognised the man. Or rather, his hair.

„No, it's not this.“ Mary said. „He's the young master of the noble house. He wants to help us with the apples. And we can use a strong hand, don't we?“

The smile in her face betrayed her, it was obvious she didn't waste a thought on a strong hand and the apples, she was interested in the young master. Her mother simply nodded to what her daughter had said. She would not question it, she would not even object. A wealthy husband, what more could you ask for in times like these? And if her daughter would be happy with it, it sounded like a perfect match. But to be honest, I never believed it could become true. I expected the old master would forbid it, but he never came in the situation to deal with it. Mary was dead three days later and I found myself not attending her wedding, but her funeral.

The circumstances of Mary's death were, for normal people I may say, beyond reason. She had died in her sleep, in the middle of a stormy night. Nothing was wrong with her, she didn't have any injuries except two small wounds on her neck. The people said, it must've been the Devil's strike. I didn't believe the devil had come to get the virgin girl, but I was expected to say the very same story to comfort the people in the village. Preach them God will fix it and the Devil won't stand a chance, if we all had strong faith and courage. And for a brief moment and the first time, I felt it was ridiculous what I said. Now I question myself, if I had already become a traitor then for having such thoughts. But my faith had never been shaken, so why would it now?

Mary had sought out my help, the day before her death. She had told me about her belief in God, her feelings for the young master and that she wished to marry as a virgin, to show that she held dear all what God had taught us. But since a few days, she continued, her dreams were haunted by ghost, and she saw herself having intercourse with another man. She had been so ashamed about it, tears had dropped from her face. All I could do had been to comfort her, give her strength and encourage her, not to believe so much in dreams. If I had known this night would be her last and I would have been the last to see her beautiful face alive, I would have never let her go home. I felt miserable the following days, hoping her funeral would allow me find a little peace for myself. But humans did not let me rest. Sunday's prayer was as crowded as it hadn't been in years, people even gathered around the building, all in fear the Devil could choose them as his victim as well. My mind troubled me and once the local police and the pastor from the next bigger town came to investigate me about this extraordinary death of the girl, I already felt like a convicted. Somehow, I could not manage to tell them about Mary's dreams, I constantly saw her face in tears, her eyes full of shame. She had trusted me to tell nobody else and even in death, I would keep that promise.

They interrogated me in the council one day before the funeral. I tried my best not to

show how much this all affected me. In the end, I did not know whether they believed that I really had told them everything I knew or not. But I felt relief when they were gone and it was over, or at least I hoped it was over. Someone knocked on the door, unwillingly but still politely, I answered to open the door. The young master entered the small room. He looked pale.

„What can I do for you?“ I asked, having a good guess myself.

„It's nothing with me,“ he let me know and I was surprised. „I came to ask you if you were all right?“ Now I was surprised even more. Since the girl had died, no one had asked me whether I was all right, everyone expected me to be strong. Yes, strong I seemed on the outside, but not on the inside.

„I am fine.“ I lied. I knew, I shouldn't lie. „But I fear you don't. You look so pale, sir.“

„So do you.“

„I've always been like this.“ I tried to smile, but I must've failed. The young master came over to me and sat down on the chair opposite to me, staring out of the window. I watched him.

„Are you sad?“ he asked me all of a sudden.

„I am. She was a good girl.“ I answered, trying to ignore the quicker rhythm of my heart. If he kept asking so many questions, I would not know what to do. The interrogation hadn't been soothing for my nerves, nor was this. I wasn't used to people asking about my feelings. My feelings had always belonged to me and God.

„Maybe she was ...“ he said absently.

„Didn't you like her?“ Tactlessly it came out of me before I could stop myself. He just turned to me, apparently confused.

„I did. But not as you might think it is. She was fun. And pretty. Nothing more.“

Heartbreaker, it shot into my mind.

„Don't get me wrong.“ he added. „It's not that I would not feel sad about what happened to her.“

„I didn't intend to give you the impression.“

„Would you like to eat dinner with my parents and me? They like you and you must be exhausted.“

The last thing I had expected had been an invitation. Elder ladies sometimes invited me to drink tea and to have company. Others invited me because I should come to see an ill or dying family member. But never I had been invited to dinner for my own sake.

„It's alright if you say you don't like.“ the young master said hastily. I was sure he did not know how to deal with the fact that I didn't say anything. But I was unsure, whether I should or not. Whether Great Sister Ann would need me or not to prepare the funeral tomorrow.

„Thank you very much. But I'm afraid, I cannot accept. My help is needed, I'm sure you understand, sir?“

„I do ... still, if you like to come, you're welcome. We always eat at 7 o'clock.“

He got up from his chair, went to the door, said goodbye and he was gone.

The rest of the day, I proved myself to be useless for anything. I couldn't say what had caused it exactly, but fact was that Great Sister Ann decided I should better rest and calm down for the funeral tomorrow. I tried to distract myself by reading, by sewing, by trying to catch some sleep. Nothing helped. The bells rang 6 o'clock and I hadn't had one single minute of peace. My mind wandered again to what Mary had told me. About the man coming to her through the window in the middle of the night. But it was just a dream, wasn't it? Yet, she hadn't dreamt it once ... three, four times she had said. What, if such a man did exist? Had he been her murderer?

I came to the conclusion that for once being alone did not do me any good and maybe others could achieve what I could not. And since I didn't know much about the new noble family, it seemed a good chance to get to know them a bit better. About 10 minutes later and still in my nun's robes, I made my way up to the mansion. I was welcomed by a servant I had not yet seen and was lead into a very beautiful living room decorated with many paintings. I guessed the lady had painted them. I saw they were done with much talent and skill and I liked them. Mostly landscapes, but I really found myself attracted to the only one showing an angel, lamenting over the people's pain. I had not much time to admire the artworks any longer, for the servant came back and told me, the young master would arrive in a few moments. I thanked him, then continued to explore my environment with my eyes. There was a piano, four very comfortable looking armchairs and a small table in the middle of them. Maybe the master talked here to business partners.

„Do you like it?“

I heard the voice of the young master behind me.

„Yes, I do. Good evening.“ I greeted him. He smiled back at me.

„I am surprised you've come here.“

„I am, too.“ I admitted and I expected him to ask me why.

„My parents haven't arrived yet. Would you like to see our garden?“ he asked and offered me his arm to link in. At least, he had manners. Still, a nun wasn't supposed to walk in such a way with a young man. I apologized for declining and so we walked slowly next to each other. The young master did talk a lot. I rather listened, except for the times he asked me something. To my own surprise, he did not want to know any reasons why I came although I said I wouldn't have the time. After the master and the lady had arrived from their visit of a friend who lived two towns north, we turned back to have dinner with them.

In the end, I should have known better than believing sharing dinner would make me think of something else but Mary. It was the subject of the evening, at least for the young master's parents. I wasn't even sure if they knew their son had met with the girl sometimes and helped us picking the apples. My head started to ache and I was sure I would leave as soon as possible. The young master accompanied me to the gate of the mansion later the evening, followed by the lady's words that I was welcome at any time again. Yes, but never again after some mysterious death.

„I'm sorry.“ the young master said at the gate. „I thought it could make you feel better.“

„I thought the same. It wasn't your fault. The dinner was excellent, please tell that the one who cooked it.“

„I will. Shall I go with you? Just in case.“

„It's not that far. I can watch myself. I doubt a madman will fly to me from nowhere.“ I said, but sarcasm filled my words. The young master instead grapped my arm. Puzzled I looked at him.

„She told you, didn't she?“ His eyes stared into mine.

„I don't know what you mean.“

„Mary ... did she tell you about her dreams?“ he repeated. I was battling with me, but then:

„Yes. I know about them.“

He released my arm. „And?“ he asked, sounding impatiently.

„What?“

„What do you think? Do you believe her?“

„I'm not sure. It sounds phantastic. ‚A man comes flying to my window' ...“ I answered tonelessly.

„Yeah, it does ...“ His voice made me clear that he did believe in Mary's dreams as little as I did and that he had the same doubts about them. But we both seemed not to question that Mary herself had believed in her dreams and that she therefore had not been lying.

„Sorry, I intended that you would not have to think about it, now I mention it myself.“ he said, looking at the ground.

„Don't worry. I'll be fine.“

„I apologize, sister.“

And before I realised, he had taken my hand and kissed it. „Good night. Sleep well, you'll need your strength tomorrow.“ And with that he turned and went back to the mansion.

I stood there paralyzed. After some moments, I hurried to get home. Breathing heavily I arrived in my room within the nun's dormitories. I was worried.. With a simply kiss -a kiss that did not mean inevitably a thing- the young master had caused me to feel entirely uncomfortable and that I should beware of him. I checked the clock on the wall. It told me to go to bed, and while I undressed myself, I noticed how much my fingers trembled. Looking down my naked body always reminded me of the greatest lie I kept with my constantly, a lie I could never throw off me.

Today it doesn't matter anymore. The only advantage of being condemned. You don't have to care. Anything that matters are your own needs, wishes and desires. But back then, the idea someone could find out what I was simply terrified me. And Kouji ... he had made a step no one else before had dared. I prayed to God he would not let Kouji discover my secret and it took ages for me to fall asleep that night. A million thoughts rushed through me, all about what would happen to me if someone got to know. Would they put me into jail? Would they say I was insane? Would they go that far and kill me? I wished my brain would stop thinking. After hours I fell into an unsteady sleep. Outside, thunder and lightning made the weather of the night.

Kapitel 2: Rising

The funeral next morning passed for me as if I didn't belong to the world I was in. My thoughts went their own way and it made me worried, that even in mind, I could neither be with Mary's mother, nor with her sisters and friends. I didn't feel pity, or at least not strong enough to realise. The people threw some undefinable looks at me. Only the young master casted me a gentle smile. And just like yesterday, my heart started beating in a quicker rythm. I felt getting sick. I decided to hurry back to my room once Mary was at peace, because I wanted to avoid meeting him. I didn't want to give him more chances to discover more about me.

This is all I remember about Mary's funeral, absent in mind as I was. I can't even tell if her mother cried or not. I also escaped Kouji. I made a promise to myself, that I would visit Mary's grave the next day again in silence, so she would not feel disappointed in heaven about my behaviour. But this day I couldn't. I felt even more useless to the world than the day before. Locked in my room I was reading in the bible, when sleep creeped into my body so fast, that I was knocked out within seconds for not having slept much the night before. By the time I woke two hours later, I had a headache as if my head was about to burst. Touching my forehead, I felt it was sweaty. So was the rest of me.

I cursed. On the way to the lavatory some of the other sisters passed me and they looked as if the just had seen a ghost, namely me. A look in the mirror told me I really looked like one, my skin paler than it was anyway, empty eyes and sweat. I looked as I felt – miserable. I filled water in the basin I carried with me, took one of the towels and a little piece of soap. My room was also my bathroom. The danger to be caught naked was to risky. I could not allow anyone to see me. Having collected basin, towel and soap, I went back to my room to clean myself. Glad of meeting with no other nun and not being needed, as it seemed, I spent more time than usual for washing my body. Maybe to get rid of things I couldn't see or maybe the very things I saw. It didn't matter, in the end, I did not get rid of either.

Before Kouji had let me know love could cross borders like these, I was afraid of my shape everytime again. But on the other hand, I couldn't imagine being from the opposite sex, being a real woman. To be honest, I was fluttered when being told I was a beautiful nun. And no matter how big my sin was, it was part of my being and God must've know it. I believed, that if he was displeased with me, he wouldn't have made me live. I still try to believe it. Maybe it's foolish.

I dressed myself for the night and looked a last time in the mirror on my bedside table. It took some moments to realise what I saw. I let out a toneless scream and backed away. For a second, I had seen myself with red eyes. I hardly dared to take another look, but I did, and found myself having the blue eyes I used to see. Relieved, I sighed. I guessed I must've been tricked by the tiredness, that still lingered in my muscles. That I was already having halluzinations ... yet, it made me worry. But to be honest, I didn't remember the incident a little later, as sleep had won its fight against me and I sank smoothly into darkness.

One thing I could not ban from my thoughts were Mary's dreams. They haunted me, although everything else had turned back to normal. I had visited her grave, just as promised, and I even came back to pray for her the day after.

I tried my best to ignore the young master and it was cruel to see him disappointed and suspicious because of my sudden coldness towards him, but I did not know how to handle it otherwise. I got hurt in this as well, I wished I wouldn't have to treat him like this. Of course I could not escape at every occasion and soon, he had discovered that the best chance to meet with me almost alone was waiting after Sunday's prayer up in the church where I helped the old man climbing down the staircase. I hated him for knowing about it. But what could I say? We met there first, of course he knew I'd be there. The old man, on the contrary, was even happier having two constant visitors every Sunday. He and the young master talked most of the time, I rather kept my mouth shut, but I watched them both very closely, especially the young master. And everytime I grew uneasy, being aware of how unjust my behaviour was. I learned so many things about him. The young master had a good and caring heart and he proved not to be the meany little heartbreaker I thought he'd be. He also played the pipe organ very well, what must've been because of his piano lessons in his youth. I liked his playing. I liked watching his hands tapping on the keys, I liked the look in his eyes, when he was absorbed into music and I even liked the smile he showed me, everytime he finished playing. But he seemed unhappy. His mouth was smiling, but his eyes were not. They bore sadness and then I felt sad as well. But he never accused me, never asked why, he just played wonderful pieces, as if he tried to express himself through the music. And I got lost so easily in its magic.

One Sunday, the fourth after Mary's funeral, the old man was ill and the young master had volunteered to play for him instead. Great Sister Ann appreciated it. The only one worrying must've been me, but not because of the young master's skills. Should I go up there afterwards? I told myself no. What reason did I have to go there? The old man was ill, no one needed to be helped. So for once, I could do as Great Sister Ann wished and follow the regular schedule. I did - and felt miserable. Every attempt to tell myself not to have a bad conscience was in vain. By the end of the day, I had decided I should apologize next Sunday. It was enough to calm my conscience, that I would at least say I was sorry.

The evening of Saturday before, I sat together with Sister Catherine in the church and wrote on a blackboard the numbers of the songs to be sung the next morning. As far as I remember, we had never talked more than had been necessary in all the Saturday evenings we had spent together. She had been one of those who had first tried to persuade Great Sister Ann to send me away. She regarded me as I was disturbing the order. But I knew better, she was afraid, because she could not handle the way I was. Even after Mary's death, she claimed that I could have had something to do with it, because I had been the last who had seen the girl alive. Nobody really listened to her, for they were all too shocked to realise, but sometimes she had a talent to manipulate people with words and hadn't she been the second mysterious death, I bet she would have succeeded to make people believe I'd be the guilty one, if she just could have gone on speaking against me. Looking back, I must say that by this time I had already been caught by the claws of darkness for sure and no one really could prevent the misery laying ahead of me. It wouldn't have made any difference at all with Sister Catherine dead and silent or alive and speaking against me, my path was leading me straight to the cross and into the open arms of my lord.

I left the church shortly before midnight and went back to the dormitories alone. Sister Catherine had wanted to stay a little longer to rewrite my blackboard, for she was sure nobody could read that terrible handwriting of me. I let her do as she pleased, I hated arguments.

I unlocked the door to my room and entered. Peaceful silence of the night. I enjoyed it. I took off my cornet and let my hair down. I was fond of its nice brown colour and its slightly curled tips.

I made myself ready to go to bed and fell into a heavy sleep almost immediately. It didn't take long until I believed laying awake in my bed and next to me was standing a man. He had long black hair and wore an elegant cape and blouse, but mostly I felt attracted to his eyes. The eyes of a devil. Dangerous and red like blood, but also so endlessly beautiful. I felt a wave of heat and excitement rushing through my body, I was unable to take my eyes off him. I got lost, his presence being my greatest pleasure. I reached to touch him. He just smiled a witty grin and then bared his teeth ... I woke startled.

Sweat on my forehead, trembling fingers and my body as cold as ice. I swallowed. I reached for a candle and lit a small light in my darkened room, that was only illuminated by a veiled moonlight. I sank back into my pillow. Who had been that man with the devil's eyes? Closing my eyes, I tried to remember every little detail of what had happened in that nightmare. Hopefully it had just been a nightmare. I tried to focus, but I hardly made any process. But then a stroke of panic hit me. I had known that dream. I had been told and now ... could it be possible that I was having the very same dream? Did it, by all coincidence, mean, I would be next? But then, I had never been told how that man looked like, nor could the man in my dream fly. Despite the fact that humans never ever could fly. And everyone had nightmares, there needn't to be connection.

I rubbed my eyes, then stared at the window. Closed, just as I left it. Again, I sighed. Of course I couldn't sleep anymore, so I rolled from one side to the other until daybreak. I got up with a headache and first washed my face with the water in the basin, that stood on my bedside table. I took a fresh robe from my wardrobe and dressed. As always I reached then for comb and mirror to pull my hair back up so it would fit in the cornet.

I exclaimed disbelievingly, letting the comb fall down and reaching for my hair with the hand that had been holding the comb before. My hair ... my beautiful brown hair wasn't only brown anymore. The lower half of it had become blond. I twirled it between my fingers, touched it – it was my hair. It had become blond over night. It appeared to be real, but ... how? I was already in disorder about the nightmare and now this? What for a cruel game was played with me? What was happening ...?

I had no more time to think about it, because I had to get ready for prayer. Inside, I was already hoping nobody would find a reason for me to take off the cornet. I didn't dare to imagine how the people would react at my new haircolour, not to mention that I would not be able to explain how this had happened. Fighting the upcoming panic, I went down in the kitchen to get some bread and butter for breakfast. I ate it on the way to the church, so I could sit and pray alone for everyone's health and for help. God had always given me comfort, it was just natural I would turn to him first. Occupied with my own worries, I didn't realise someone was already waiting for me. The moment I entered the church's yard through the iron gate, I heard footsteps advancing and with a look to the entrance, I saw the young master. I stopped abruptly, but he kept hurrying towards me and once he had reached me, he embraced me.

„Thank God, you're alive!“ he said and his voice revealed that he had been worrying very much about me, it seemed. I couldn't move a single bit, my body was simply frozen. After what seemed an eternity to me, he let go and looked rather

embarrassed now. I looked back, but with demanding eyes.

„I'm sorry.“ he said. „It's just ... I don't know how to say, but I ... I dreamed you died. It seemed so real.“

I stared at him, my look getting menacing.

„I saw a man with red eyes, he was next to you. He looked like the devil and he – Mana?“

I felt a dizzy spell all of a sudden. I had closed my eyes and laid my hand on my forehead, shivering. The young master was holding me again. Who would be surprised if I was feeling sick when being told this? As for my part, I wasn't.

„Mana ... are you alright?“ The young master settled in front of me, his hands on my shoulders. In his beautiful eyes was fear I could drop dead every second. I contributed him with a pitiful smile, nodding. I simply had to smile, no matter how feeble it was. He had called me by my name for the first time.

He smiled back, a smile I had never seen before, although he smiled so often to me. There was something else in his eyes I was unable to grasp, but it affected me. He had reached my heart, to say the truth. Yet at that time, I was too oblivious to understand it.

The sound of someone clearing his throat loudly made us both jump apart. It was the old man.

„God, never give me such a heartattack again in my life!“ the young master complained.

„You'r young, sir, you won' have a hear'attack.“ the old man answered, having an undefinable look in his eyes. „Did he trea' you righ', Mana?“

„Oh .. oh yes. I'm fine.“

It was then when I realised how odd it must've looked, as the old man had seen the young master and me together. He thought he could have wanted to lay hands on me.

„You look so pale, Mana ... are you really sur'?“

„Really, it's nothing.“ I insisted. I admitted, that probably I could not fool the old man with my indifferent face, I was still shivering lightly and I surely had no healthy skincolour right now. I reached in one of the pockets in my skirt and pulled out the keys for the wooden entrance door of the church but I stopped once I had put the key in the hole.

„What?“ the young master asked.

„..... nothing.“ I opened the door and let us three enter. The door had been unlocked. Had Sister Catherine really forgotten about it? I couldn't imagine, she was picky and took every chance she got to show us how much attention she paid to the rules. The bad feeling in my stomach grew constantly bigger. But before entering the heart of the church, the young master and I helped the old man to climb up the stairs. Every step upwards felt like additional weight on my whole body. Once we had reached the small podium, where the pipe organ was, I lead the old man to the bench and sat down with him, telling him which songs had been chosen for today. The young master just watched us. But he was restless. After some moments, I heard him walking up and down behind us. I couldn't stand the sounds of his walking, so I got up to talk to him.

„Sir, please. I'm not going to die right away.“ I whispered to him, not wanting to be overheard. „You probably had just a nightmare, that happens to everyone.“

„I know, but ... Hell, it seemed so real! I was worried ...“

„Don't worry about me, please.“

He hesitated, then: „Will you promise to be fine?“

„I promise.“ I answered, not knowing if I really could keep it. Yet the young master

calmed down for the moment.

„Holy Father in Heaven ...“ I heard the voice of the old man say shockedly and turned around. He was standing next to the pipe organ on the railing and looking down to the altar. The young master and I came over to him to have a look ourself.

By what I saw, I clapped my hand on my mouth. The young master's eyes widened disbelievingly, just as terrified as the old man looked.

She was not laying there as Mary did in her bed, looking peacefully as if she was sleeping. She was laying there on her stomach on the altar, arms hanging lifelessly from its sides. Her skin wore the colour of death and her robe was drenched with the red liquid, that once had run though her veins. Her cornet had been taken off and strands of her black hair glued on her face. She looked like a mistreated doll of a mischievous child.

Once I had overcome the first shock of the scenary hell had confronted me with, I attempted to run down to her, but the young master grapped my arm and held me back. I struggled with him to free myself in vain, his grip was stronger than mine.

„Mana, you can't do anything anymore, she's dead!“ he said in sharp tone. I also knew for sure that she was dead, but bearing stubbornly hope until a doctor would have really confirmed it, I refused to believe it.

„Mana, please, stop!“ the young master called to me. I was still fighting to get free. The old man could just watch the fight and slowly but surely my powers left me. The young master, realising the struggle was over, loosened his grip and let me sank slowly on the ground. Head on my knees, I didn't know what to think anymore, I just heard the young master say the old man should watch me, he'd go fetch someone, but who, I had not understood. Then, he lifted my chin with his hand gently, so I had to face him.

„Stay here until I return.“ His voice was so soft now. I nodded feebly. „I'll be back in no time.“

The young master got up and left, my eyes following him until he was out of sight and even then, I kept looking at the little corridor that lead to the stairs.

I waited. For sister Catherine, as cruel as she must've died, I could not feel any compassion or pity. For every other person, I was sure, I would have already spoken a prayer, but somehow ... I did not think about it. I just sat on the ground, back to wall, gazing nowhere with empty eyes and waiting. My mouth was dry, I didn't want to talk. The old man didn't want to, either, it seemed, but he was mumbling words, but I didn't catch anything of it. Every now and then, my eyes wandered back to the corridor. How much time had passed since he had gone? It couldn't have been so long, but for me time ticked away incredibly slow. My headache returned and sleep wanted to take power over me as well and I was only too tempted to give in, getting carried away by nice dream, far away from where reality began. At first, I didn't even realise the loud voices crying and the feet trampling towards the building. Just as passive as I had been during the funeral, I kept waiting until someone would tell me to raise, go to wherever I was supposed to go or do whatever I should do.

It was another sister, who came to us in the end. The young master had not kept his promise, he had said he'd come. Sourly, I got to my feet again and advanced the railing one more time to look at what was happening down there. Sister Catherine had already been removed from the altar and was laying next to it, a white cloth drawn over her body. I recognized Great Sister Ann, who gave instrutions, trying to get hold of the situation. People were buzzing around the building, shouting, begging, praying. I saw the young master down there as well. On his shoulder lent a woman, from who I

concluded it might be sister Catherine's sister, because she had the same features in her face and she was sobbing desperately. He had laid an arm around her, comforting. My grip on the railing tightened, my eyes narrowed. I turned on my heels, following the sister and the old man downstairs and out of church. Once we were out, upset people incircled us, searching for certainty and God's protection. They reached for my fellow sister and me and I found myself half-struggling with the people – they didn't see I was just a human, too, after all. Everytime I withdrew my hand from one, it got caught by another. Suddenly, I panicked. Not despite the fact that I hated crowds and had paranoia of it. But because the thought of my hair had jumped into my mind from nowhere and I didn't even dare to think about it if someone got hold of my cornet. I heard myself yelling that they should let go of me, feverishly trying to push them away. I had no control anymore, panic was responsible for my actions and I almost hit an old woman in her face and those who had seen it, stepped back, casting irritated looks at me, almost as if they believed I had gone insane.

„Stop it!“ someone called from behind me. „Let go of her!“

Whoever called, I didn't believe it would help. And yet a few did as they had been told, but three or four still clinged to me. „STOP IT!“

The young master seized one man by the collar of his jacket and pulled him away, then freed my arm that was held painfully by the fat and fleshy hand of a woman, who was twice as big as I was. I was lifted up from the ground by the young master and he carried me, arms around my waist and chest to chest. Eyes closed, I clenched my fingers in his shoulders for support, letting it happen, only to get away, away from those madmans. My heart was racing, hot tears gathering in my eyes, it had been too much. That dream, the young master had apparently shared, the change of my hair, sister Catherine's death, the crowd – I would have appreciated it to pass out. But unfortunately, I did not.

I was carried to the house of the local council. Even after the young master had set my feet back to the ground, I could not bring myself to let go of him, he was the only one in reach, the only one who did not treat me like some sort of messiah. He did not push me away, on the contrary, he gently put his arm around me as we sat down on a bench and soon my head was also resting on his shoulder.

„I'm sorry.“ he whispered gently. „I should have come with you in the first place.“

Again a lonely tear rolled down my cheek, drying away as it reached the fabric of his jacket.

„Shall I take off your cornet?“ he asked and even though I knew, he just said it because he wanted to make sure I was comfortable, he had hit a nerve again and more tears found their way to the surface. I didn't sob or anything, I sat there probably like a statue, but yet, I was crying. The young master must've understood that I would not want my cornet to be taken off and started caressing my shoulder with his thumb. How long we sat there, I cannot tell. But his presence calmed me and made me feel safer.

Later, Great Sister Ann, the mayor and the sheriff from the police station entered. Reflexingy, I lifted my head from the young master's shoulder, facing them as they advanced us.

„I'm sorry to tell you, sister Mana, but we have to interrogate you again.“ the sheriff said. „I've been told you and the murdered had been together yesterday to choose the songs for today's prayer?“

„Yes.“ I answered with an hardly audible voice.

„You must still be in shock, but I have to. I'm sure you understand?“

„Yes, I do.“

„Mana? Is it really ok for you?“ the young master interfered. I nodded to him with a shy smile on my lips, then got up and followed the others in the next room, where I had already been after Mary's death. Except a table and some wooden chairs and three small windows, there was nothing else in the room. An empty and cold chamber, just perfect for interrogations.

I was told to take a seat and I did, while all others kept standing. I already wished it was over.

„Sister, did you realise anything strange, when you were in church with her yesterday night?“ the sheriff started.

„No, it was just as usual.“

„Did you talk to her?“

„We hardly talked to each other. Just the necessary.“

„Weren't you on good terms?“

„We had differences ever since I arrived here.“

„I see. True?“ he addressed Great Sister Ann.

„As far as I can tell, Catherine and Mana had always had different attitudes and views. I don't say either was bad. They've fulfilled their tasks always as God pleased.“

„Fine then.“ he turned back to me. „Why didn't you leave church together?“

„I left around midnight I guess. Sister Catherine wanted to stay longer.“

He turned up his nose. „Did she say why?“

I hesitated. „She wanted to pray.“

„In the middle of the night?“ the mayor asked, sounding as if he didn't a word of what I answered. Well, he was right, but I wouldn't have let him know she had criticized my handwriting.

„Does a nun need a reason to pray?“ I replied.

„..... No.“ He turned, and walked a little. „It's just a bit funny, don't you think, sister?“

I kept silent. I knew exactly what he was going to suggest.

„The young girl drops dead without a warning and you're the last who has seen her alive. Now a sister of yours is found dead in church, brutally killed. And again, you were the last one who had seen her alive.“

„It could be coincidence.“ Great Sister Ann objected. „I don't believe sister Mana could have done this.“

„How did she die?“ I asked, relieved that Great Sister Ann did not join in the mayor's assumptions.

„Broken neck. But, just like the young girl, she had those two small wounds. So it's likely the murderer is the same.“ the sheriff provided. „Only someone powerful could have achieved that.“

„There you go. Sister Mana would not have been able to.“

„Yeah, yeah, you're right.“ the mayor quickly said. „I didn't want to charge her.“

My insides clinched. If he knew I was just as capable of it as he was ... it made me nervous, although I had done nothing wrong. My secret seemed to become an even bigger burden than it was anyway.

„I guess that has been all for now?“ Great Sister Ann tried to finish the interrogation.

„Yes. Thank you for your co-operation.“ the sheriff thanked me.

„I've just done my duty.“

Slowly I got up from my chair and the mayor and the sheriff left the chamber. Great Sister Ann did not. I realised, she wanted to say something of which she didn't like the other two to hear. So I waited as well until they were out of sight. She sighed.

„Mana,“ she began and her voice was heavy. „I beg you to be honest.“

„I will.“

She paused, apparently weighing the words she was going to use. „Dont bring yourself in any more trouble. You've heard it. The mayor already suspects you.“

„I know. But I swear to God, I have nothing to do with the deaths.“

Great Sister Ann sighed again, then came over to me with a mild smile on her lips, yet her eyes looked at me sternly. „Don't give them a reason to harm you. Raging humans don't make any differences if comes down to revenge.“

„Thank you. God bless you. I will watch my step.“

„Being close to the young master could be such a reason, sister Mana.“

My mouth opened a little in surprise. Great Sister Ann continued.

„I don't want to accuse you for anything.“ She laid her hands on my shoulders, looking directly in my eyes with her ice-blue ones. „You are a nun. God is the only one you chose to love.“

„I know.“

She took my face in her hands, apparently pleased. „You've always been reasonable.“

Then she turned on her heels and opened the door to leave. Although I only saw her back, I know she didn't cast the young master the same look she had just showed towards me. The young master had waited for me and entered the room as Great Sister Ann left. Of course this didn't do her suspicion any good. He looked very puzzled to me and I was still standing there, motionless, with my head so full of confusion, that I didn't know to do. Being told to stay away from the young master because it would prevent me from getting pushed into the light of murderer was one thing, but what really made me feeling sick was that it contradicted what I wanted. God gave me comfort, but he never could put an arm around me.

„Mana ...? Shall we go?“ the young master asked carefully, guessing my thoughts weren't here in the small chamber.

„You will go without me.“

Now he was puzzled even more. Of course, it hadn't been the first time that I rejected him, but my voice made the difference. Toneless, monotonous, cold. I had never spoken to him that way. Of course I wasn't indifferent to this in the least, but what choices did I have? Being human includes hoping to make the best out of something bad or turn it into something good. But it doesn't always work. Humans are unpredictable, so are their actions and so are their successes. If I had known it wouldn't help me, I might would have given up resistance, had thown myself into his arms and maybe shamelessly loved him until someone got to know of it. But the believe this tragedy would end for the better sooner or later made me struggle and took all my spirits.

„Mana, I think it's better if someone accompanies you ...“ he tried it again.

„No. I'm fine on my own.“ I would not allow him to have a chance in this.

One night, Kouji has told me how much my words had hurt him back then. I knew it myself, but words were the only protection I had left. Sharp knives, mercilessly hitting where it had the most painful effect. For a brief moment, I had even thought of I was being given a favor. He wouldn't discover more about me and I had a reason to maintain a certain distance, what more could I have asked for? ... That's what reason made me think. But part of the human misery is also the natural circumstance, that we are not only lead by reason. We all have a soul and a heart, providing us with a conscience and emotions, fighting endlessly with reason until we die. And reason is

the only thing that survives. Death is a fact. Even if your family and friends feel sorrow and miss you, for you only death remains a an unescapable certainty.

I, naturally, did not know my death lingered right behind me, just waiting for the best opportunity to rip life out of me. And even if I rejected Kouji that day in the chamber after sister Catherine's death, I think different about it now ... I should have let him hold and kiss me as long as we could feel the warmth of vivid lips.

„Mana ...? What's wrong?“ the young master tried a third time and while he asked me, he approached me.

„Nothing.“ I told him, just as cold as before.

„Nothing!“ he exclaimed. „Do you think I'm a fool? Nothing? After what has happened this morning? Never.“

For a while, neither of us said a word. Silence hovered between us and its pressure got heavier every second it continued.

„..... I can't meet with you anymore.“ I spoke to him honestly. His features relaxed a little, now it was being said.

„Did they say why?“ I could tell he was angry. Angry with whom I wasn't really sure about.

„Sir, I'm a nun. I cannot meet with young men just as I please. I made a vow, I'm sure you're aware of it.“

„I am.“ the young master's voice was still angry, but also bitter and sad. „I've just wanted to make sure you're fine. And from what I can tell, this affects you a great deal. You're just perfect in restoring yourself a stoic appearance.“

„Maybe I am.“

„Well then, are you still saying you're fine on your own?“

„I do.“

„You are like a stubborn kid.“

He was right. I could admit I liked to go with him. The young master continued giving me some kind of a lecture.

„Why should it be wrong, if I just walked beside you, until you reach your room, so I know you won't be bothered on the way home?“

I sighed. „Because they see us together. Haven't you noticed the look in the eyes of the old man?“ Now it was his turn to keep silent. „It wouldn't take long until there were rumours.“

The young master started walking up and down. As far as I remebered, he always did walking when something worried or upset him.

„You're right ... it's just ...“

„Yes?“

He faced me again, came ove to me and reached out to stroke my cheek. Being surprised, I retreated, but he follow my move and so his hand was still resting gently on my skin. „I say it again, I only want to know you're fine. I'm very well aware of whom you have promised to serve all your life.“

I nodded. He had half-confessed his feelings for me, but I tried my best not to react too much. Yet it had melted down the coldness I had shown to him since he had entered.

„I don't want to see you in trouble, either. But being with me will inevitably result in trouble, so I want you to stay away.“

The young master didn't answer with words, he responded with his body, pulling me and a soft embrace. I let it happen once more, I wasn't able to resist the warmth.

„They suspect you, don't they?“

„You shouldn't do that.“ I said, maybe it was a try to make him stop – and me. And of course, I wanted to avoid the subject. If I told him, he might wanted to help me. „And it's not your business to bother about me being suspected or not. Please ...“

„I can't change your mind.“ He let go of me and his voice had a final tone.

„Understand it, please ... I do not want to be a reason for you to get charged as well. It's not that they had any proves. A mere suspect.“

„Will they find proves?“

I shook my head slowly, eyes closed. „No. My conscience is clear.“ Inwardly, I thought different. Great Sister Ann was right. As long as the murderer kept on killing so carefully without any traces remaining, they will seek for another scapegoat they could condemn instead. Might as well be me.

„Well then ... I guess I'll leave you be.“

„I thank you for your care. God bless your good heart.“

The young master smiled weakly, then left the room. I sighed heavily.

Kapitel 3: Beware

The days that followed were horrible. Even if the village calmed down slowly but surely for a second time, I couldn't. I felt so empty, so uneasy, so alarmed. I jumped inwardly when my name was said or called, I was afraid if someone wished to talk to me. I didn't eat right, I hardly slept. I felt like I had no real protection at all, as if they regarded me as their pray, only waiting for the moment I wouldn't pay attention to jump out of their hidehood and tear me into pieces. Everytime I saw the young master in the streets by chance, he looked at me with sad eyes, then quickly turned his face away. My heart grew heavy every time he looked at me, every time he turned away it was pierced with pain. Feelings, I never had before. And even if I had only a vague idea of what had happened to me, others weren't that oblivious not to realise that I was nothing else but lovesick.

It was a cloudless night, the night following sister Catherine's funeral, when I woke suddenly again, my whole body sweaty and shivering. I had dreamt it again. The man, the red-gleaming eyes ... I was drawn to him spreading my arms for him, but again, before he had reached me, I had woken startled. I lifted my body in an upright position, whipping away the sweat with my blanket. My heart was bumping against my chest so hard it hurt. I swallowed and got up, searching for the basin. With my hand, gulped some water, then used it to cool my forehead. I had to lean on my other arm for support, my legs refused to find their natural strength to carry my body. Why was I so attracted by that man? And why only in the dream? I did not want him to touch me. He wasn't allowed to, no one was. I was a nun, getting touched or even deflowered is like committing an unforgivable crime. It would mean to break the promise I had made in the past to God. I would not allow anyone to interfere.

Thinking of how I could possibly avoid any more dreams about desiring a man with devilish eyes, I got a horrible feeling. The last time I dreamt the dream, Catherine had died. And I had seen her last. I could not move back into bed, I stood there paralyzed. Who was the one I had seen last? And almost immediately, I saw the young master in my inner eye. No, I told myself, you have not seen him last. No point in worrying about him. Yet his picture before my eyes was somewhat like a curtain, hindering me to see clearly the shape of the one I wished good night last. All those thoughts twirled in my mind and I tried to focus so badly, but it didn't work. But even more I refused to give up trying it could rescue and innocent's life ... and for the young master, I didn't even dare to consider it again.

By the time I woke again some hours later, I realised that I had sat down on my bed again and then fallen asleep once more.

„Mana, what is wrong with you the last few days?“ a sister scolded me. She had apparently been sent to my room to wake me. „You don't eat, you're day-dreaming and now you're sleeping until noon missing prayer and other things!“

I rubbed my eyes and was beyond relief, that I had had brains enough to hide my blond hair under my nightgown just for cases like these. Luckily, she didn't pay attention to me additionally, she was too busy to go on scolding me.

„Great Sister Ann is just as worried, because you miss things. You should've been at-“

„Has anything happend?“ I asked.

„What?“

„Has anything happened?“ I repeated my question.

„No, why?“

I sighed. It didn't mean anything, but I made me breath easier.

„Why? Listen! I'm talking to you!“

„Sister, if I may interrupt?“

Great Sister Ann was standing in the door. She looked sternly to us and the lumb was back in my throath again.

„I would like to have a word with sister Mana alone.“

„Yes, of course.“ she answered, leaving obediently.

Great Sister Ann closed the door, then came to me and sat down on the edge of my bed. She seemed to pity me, all of a sudden, but her voice was as clear and stern as before.

„Mana ... when I told you, you should stay away from the young master, I didn't know what was happening.“

My heart froze. Whatever now came, it couldn't be anything good. I was so scared something could have happend to him, but as long as I didn't know, I tried not to show how worried I was.

„Is he alright?“ I wanted to make sure. The thought of him being dead was breath-taking, silently I already prayed to God he was fine and alive.

Great Sister Ann nodded. „Yes, yes, he is fine.“ Then she looked seriously at me. I was suprisied. „He's here to see you.“

My heart had jumped.

„Why does he want to talk to me?“ I asked.

„He didn't say it, but Mana, I have to make sure one thing before I can allow him to see you.“ she looked worried and sternly at the same time. I was rather confused. „Who is it to whom you have made a vow?“

„To God.“ I said, matter-of-factly.

„Mana, I believe you. You are a faithful young woman. But I think your mind is not with God the whole time.“ she said. „I am worried about you, but you have got to make a decent cut, your feelings for the young master will kill you. And I'm not only talking of giving the people a target to aim at, you cannot handle the situation you're in, you barely eat. Your body won't cope with that for a longer time, so promise me you will make clear to him you have chosen to serve God and that you will forget about him.“

She had spoken it all aloud and she was right, but I would not want it to be true. But what else could I have done but promising to her I would forget about the young master and ban him from my heart? Great Sister Ann's worries could not justify the decision I had to make ... was there anything the human heart would ever accept as a rightfully reason if the love it longs for is denied to it?

I swallowed down my inner protest and nodded, gave in to what I would not want.

God knows this is better for me, too, I kept telling myself.

„I know it's hard for you ... but I only want to help you.“ Great Sister Ann said compassionately, then she got up from my bed. „Get dressed, I will send the young master to you, then.“

She left my with that.

I got up, quickly searching for my robe and cornet. I threw my nightgown on my bed and pulled the robe over my head. I fished for my brush to tidy my hair and I was so nervous during the whole process of dressing, I believed it would still take an eternity to finish and hearing footsteps approaching didn't do me any better, either.

The young master knocked.

I threw the cornet away, stuffled my hair under my robe and called to come in. I

forced myself to be as settled as I could be, but when I saw him, I wasn't so sure how I could ever do what I had been told. He didn't look well. His skin was paler than ever and he seemed thinner.

„I ... well ...“ the young master began, but broke halfway.

„I thought we had decided not to meet again?“ There I went again. Cruel, cold self-protection.

„I know, I know!“

„Then what business brings you to me?“

„I had the dream again ... I saw that man with you, I saw you dead ...“

„Well you see, I am perfectly fine.“

The young master approached me again. „Mana, I know those dreams are real. Mary had them, and she is dead. I dream it and the next day a sister of yours is dead as well.“

„I know.“

„But you don't believe it.“

„I believe it. I have those dreams as well.“

He stared shockedly at me. „You ... have those dreams, too?! Since when?“

„Since you had them. I had the same dream the same night.“

„Why didn't you tell me?!“

„To what purpose?“

„Mana, I was nearly dying because I was so worried about you!“ he accused me. „When I came here this morning, asking where you'd be and no one could tell me – have you any idea of what I imagined?!“

„So you come running to me everytime you dream it?“ I replied, anger rising.

„I can't believe you could be so cold to this!“

„I have to be.“

„And why? What gives you the right to treat me that way?“

„I am not yours.“

He retreated. „Mana, please ... I know there is something else that makes you act the way you do, what is it?“

„Why should I tell you?“

„Mana, I do want to help you. You cannot do everything on your own. And besides us nobody knows of that mysterious man. I am not going to tell anyone, it would mean sentencing us both. So whatever it is that bothers you, I beg you to trust me.“

„I only trust God.“

„But God won't rescue you!“ he exclaimed. I showed no reaction to it, I just stared. But he could tell he had said something he shouldn't have better said to a nun.

„I ... Mana ... I'm sorry! I didn't mean it that way!“

He walked to me again, laid his arms around my neck and pulled me to his body.

„Honestly ... I'm just so worried ... I did not want to insult you ...please.“ he whispered to me, regretting it honestly.

„I know ...“ I said and amazingly, once again, my voice wasn't sharp anymore, but soft. The young master began rocking slightly and I closed my eyes. It felt so good, so endlessly right. We often had such moments ... fighting, because we both worried too much about the other, ending up in an embrace, expressing ourselves with our bodies that spoke a language our tongues were forbidden to form into words. His hand started slowly caressing my shoulder and soon, I responded by putting my arms around him and I knew for sure, I would never be able and courageous enough to send him away. No matter if being with him meant my death, right in this moment I was

willing to pay the price and I had so many burdens in life, why not finding salvation in death, a sweet death of love.

The young master moved his head to look at me and I saw he smiled, I had to smile as well.

„What?“ I asked.

„Your hair ... I see its colour for the first time. A nice brown colour.“

I smiled torturedly. „Thank you ...“

„You're beautiful ...“

His eyes were searching for approval and I didn't even hesitate to offer it. Soon I was caught by a touch so gentle and loving it made me freeze and burn at the same time. His lips caused all this to me, I let him do as he pleased, nusing my own, getting carried away by the very emotion, that reigned over all others.

We didn't care about anything, time, place, the people that might entered my room. I didn't even realise he was toying with my hair, but as long as we kissed, the world around us was shut out. I was so anxious about kissing him, I felt so embarassed, when he had let go of me, smiling and telling me it seemed I wouldn't want to stop until we died of suffocation. The young master knew this was even more special for me than for him, he just pecked my lips again and smiled happily.

„Will you continue to ignore me?“ he asked softly.

I didn't answer, just nuzzled my head to his shoulder and hold him tightly.

„Couldn't ask for more.“ he said, contently, stroking through my hair. „But I guess, I should leave, hm?“

„I know ... just a little.“

I heard him chuckling. It was just so comfortable at his shoulder, in his arms ...

„Your hair is blond, too?“ I heard him say in an astonished voice.

My eyes flashed open and my fingers clenched in his jacket more tightly.

„Is it natural this way?“

„I didn't do anything.“ I answered nervously, trying not to get upset and remembering that the young master probably would believe the truth, because he had seen that man in his dreams as well. I continued explaining myself, just to avoid him getting ideas about how I could make my haircolour change. „My hair has turned blond by itself ... the morning after I had dreamt about that man for the first time ... I don't know how it has happened ...“

The young master didn't say anything to it and I got even more nervous than I was anyway.

„I really did not do anything.“ I insisted and faced him again, a little panic in my eyes.

„I believe you.“

Again, I buried my face in his shoulder. „I don't know how ... I really don't ... what if someone found out ...? Someone, who doesn't know about that man ...?“

„So it's the the fear of people getting to know about your hair and the dreams that scared you so you quit every contact to humans?“

I nodded to his shoulder. „You know they suspect me ... I cannot explain, they would probably make something up, twisting everything, maybe they say I'm a witch ... God knows I'm innocent, but they don't.“

„You told me they wouldn't find proves, so they won't.“ he tried to comfort me.

„Mana, I would do anything to help you. But I have to go now, I'll meet with you again.“

I looked up to him. „You promise?“

„I promise.“

And his lips sealed mine, too short to enjoy, but long enough verify their touch and meaning.

„You'll hear from me. Be careful.“

„You better be, too. We've become sinners ...“

He let go of me and I mirrored the movement, but he put his hands on my cheeks, focusing me.

„But I love you. And if love was a sin, something about God's teachings must be incredibly wrong.“

He drew his hands away gently and left my room with a smile.

Maybe he was right ... but only that this would not turn out to be an ordinary love between man and woman and I didn't even dare to think about it, when the young master would ever want to make love to me. I truly hoped for being a nun, he would never consider it.

Great Sister Ann had from that morning on a constant eye on me and avoided to let me leave the convent or church alone. Maybe she could tell from my regained easiness, that I might have done anything but a decent cut. Some of the other nuns were talking as well. By the time sister Jane, from whom we all knew she had still a great liking for men, had come to me the next day, trying to give me some advice of how I should treat my lucky one, I knew how far the 'news' had already travelled. For me it wasn't funny in the least, even though sister Jane told me I should be happy. I was happy, but the circumstances didn't allow me to enjoy it throughoutly, even less I was allowed to show it openly.

I didn't hear anything from the young master the next day and also not the day after. I was getting nervous again, but I couldn't blame him. I was better guarded by Great Sister Ann than the queen when leaving the palace. She was worried and I thanked her for the care I didn't deserve, considering I had disobeyed her plea and that I secretly wished, I would be allowed to go downtown, hoping I could catch some pieces of talk about the noble family. Just to make sure everything was all right. Naturally, I was too afraid to ask directly. I trusted neither of them, I still felt like prey of the human vultures.

The young master probably also had realised that meeting with me alone was becoming a major problem, for he wasn't allowed to enter the actual convent anymore and I, on the other hand, wasn't allowed to leave it. I was focusing my hopes on the next Sunday where I could meet him up in the tower.

What truly came unexpectedly for me then was meeting the lady on Saturday noon with her full painting equipment in the church. I saw her looking every now and then to the windows we both liked so much. Great Sister Ann was with me again, but I was surprised to hear, that she knew about the lady doing a painting of the windows.

„My lady, I hope you make some good progress?“ she asked, approaching the easel. I followed her with small steps.

„Yes, I have nearly finished, sister.“ she answered, stepping aside to let Great Sister Ann take a look. Then she noticed my presence as well. „Good day, sister Mana. It's nice to see you!“

„It's nice to see you, too.“ I answered.

„You were right about the windows.“ the lady told me with a smile on her lips.

„They're always bathed in a warm light somehow, even if it's grey and cloudy outside.“ I nodded, feeling a little fluttered. She waved, so I came closer to have a look myself at the painting.

„Beautiful.“ I said simply. The lady really had a great talent to use colours and brushes.
„I really hoped you'd like it.“

„I do. It looks like a copy, just on a canvas.“

„How long will it take you to finish?“ Great Sister Ann asked. „Sister Mana and I have come to arrange new ornaments on the altar.“

„Oh, don't worry. It doesn't bother me.“ the lady replied. „I should be the one asking about bothering, since you gave me the permission to do the painting, I still have to thank you.“

„It makes me rather honoured, that you have found interest in our little church, that you even paint it so beautifully.“

„It's a pleasure.“

They kept talking for a while, I just listened to them. Great Sister Ann was truly passionate about raising some more interest in the lady for the church. The building was old and some things needed to be restored, so I guessed she was hoping for some benefits. I had no interest in those formalities and went to the altar to start with what we had come for in the first place. The flowers had all lost their bloom and I went through the backdoor to throw them to the others, that would end up as fodder for animals in winter. Waiting some more seconds to enjoy the silence and the loneliness in the backgarden, I took a deep breath of autumn's cool air and stretched myself. Trees and bushes turned their dresses in colours of red, orange and yellow, as if they were on fire, encircling the whole sacred area. I liked these days of the year best. I drank a bit more from the fascinating sight that nature offered me and walked back in the church.

When I came back, my heart leaped to my throat. The lady was packing her equipment to go home and her son had come to help her with the easel, along with some servant I also recognized as the one who had opened the door on my first visit in the mansion. For a brief moment I thought of going back, but then, they had already seen me. I didn't know how I should behave. It wasn't that I was alone with the young master, now there were three others around and it made me anxious. It didn't take long until Great Sister Ann threw a warning glare at me, I shouldn't do anything I was not supposed to do.

„Sister Mana, please go fetch the flowers from the cellar.“ she ordered me to do. I turned again, having mixed feelings, but at least I knew young master was fine. I lit a candle and opened the door and the musty air filled my nose. Down there were no windows, just dust, cobwebs and the smell of earthly moisture.

I had taken the first steps of the staircase, when someone put his hand from behind on my mouth and I let out a muffled scream. With terrified eyes I stared right ahead, not daring to move again.

„Shhhh!“ I heard the familiar voice. „Mana ...“

The hand on my mouth was withdrawn and I felt a gentle kiss on my cheek.

„You shouldn't have followed me.“ I whispered.

„I know ...“ he said guiltily. „I guess your sister will run after us, once my mother isn't talking to her anymore.“

„You're putting us into trouble.“ I reminded him, as I felt his arms sliding around my waist.

„Not, if I return with you and the flowers in time.“

„Ah. You will?“

„Yes, I will.“ he said, sounding confident and taking my hand that was not holding the candle, leading the way down.

„I need to talk to you, but don't stop doing what you've been told.“

I nodded and headed straight to the only hole in the wall under which a wooden table was, full of colourful, pretty flowers in different vessels.

„I want you to come up to the mansion this evening.“

I nearly dropped the candle and quickly placed it in the table. My heart grew heavy, while I arranged a new bouquet of flowers. „Sir, you know I can't.“

„She forbids you to go outside, I haven't seen you in town the last few days.“

„She is just worried.“

„Yeah, worried about the reputation of the convent, it has nothing to do with you.“

I bit my lips.

„She knows the mayor and the sheriff suspect you, I even hear some people in town phantasizing about you.“ the young master continued. I did cut a thin rope to bind the flowers together. „She will treat you like a prisoner until something happens again, so she can be sure the blame won't be on her and her convent.“

„Why doesn't she expel me right away, if it's just that?“ I asked, starting on the second bouquet.

„Because she's lacking a reason.“

„You could be a reason.“

„Mana, she won't do it. You should have heard her talking to my mother, she wants us to benefit the church with money.“ he focused me with his eyes and I felt a slightly cold shudder running down my spine. „If she expelled you for having a love affair with me, surely she can't ask for money anymore. To avoid both troubles you bring, she makes you do everything with her, so she can control what you do.“

I barely could concentrate or remember which flowers I had already collected and which ones were still missing. What the young master had said seemed all so logical ... and I, sheepish as I was, had thought it all had to do with care. I didn't want to believe it. Great Sister Ann had always stood up for me, why should it all now vanish just like nothing?

„Mana, let me do this.“ he said, pushed me away from the flowers gently and finished the bouquet for me. Right on the clue, I heard Great Sister Ann entering the cellar and descending the stairs. The candle she held did not illuminate her face well enough to recognize the exact expression, but her eyes let me know, she had expected something else than seeing the young master arranging the flowers for me. For that, she did not know what to say, so I raised my voice.

„The young master was so kind to help me.“

„I can see it. That's really nice. But I guess you will have to finish the bouquets, sister Mana.“ she said, then addressed the young master. „Your mother wants to leave, sir. You better go up.“

He pulled on the ropes once again, then handed me the two fresh bouquets. „Well then, goodbye.“

„Goodbye. And thank you for your help.“ I said and saw him winking.

„Goodbye.“ Great Sister Ann said as well and the young master took the candle from the table and went upstairs. Great Sister Ann did wait a little, then told me to go back again and change all remaining flowers in the church. During the whole progress, I kept thinking about what the young master had told me. I couldn't believe it was true. And then, he expected me to visit him. But how should I achieve it, sneaking out of the convent when being watched every second ... with whatever pretext I would come up, I doubted I could persuade her to let me go. On the other hand, I was still battling with myself whether it was a good idea. The young master had just said I should come,

but why, he had not mentioned. But he loved me, of course he wished to see me and I wanted to be with him as well. Still I was not obliged to have such thoughts. My conscience, my reason, my responsibility; they all told me I should stay where I was, but the longing of my heart seemed to conquer them easier than I hoped. After a while, I had made my decision. I would try to go and see him, for what reason I had to find out then. Mentally I apologized to Great Sister Ann and to God for being so helplessly in love and thus no good child. I still did not know when and how I would find a chance to escape, but maybe the chance would find me.

The closer the evening came, the more stormy the wind grew and the raindrops beat hard against the windows. I sat in my room alone looking outside without seeing anything because of the water running down the glass. In this weather I couldn't visit him. I watched my disappointed face in the window glass and the tears on my cheeks were the waters from heaven. Of course no one would expect me to leave in this weather, but I was risking my health with it and if I got a cold, it was too easy to find out where it came from. I tried to sigh my heavy heart away and abandoned the window. Soon it was time for dinner and I joined my sisters in the hall, where we used to eat together in the evening. I heard the rain getting heavier and still thunder and lightning were rulers of the skies above us. I ate my meal silently and only wished to return to my room as soon as I could, for I hated all the chatting around me when being so lost in my thoughts.

It was a sound as if the sky had crushed down on us. And within seconds, the windows were gleaming reddish. After the first shock was overcome, some of the sisters got up to the door to see what had happened. One by one went outside and I did as well. The old oak, the largest tree we had near the convent, had been hit by lightning and was burning from roots to tips. Gazes were fixed at the burning tree, upset people coming out of their houses and under the mask of confusion I didn't think anymore, just took advantage of it. My resolution was made within seconds. Taking some reassuring looks to my left and right to make sure everyone was occupied with the burning tree and not paying attention to me, I hastened to the gate and afterwards launched into a run down the path. Wisely I didn't take the actual street, but took a narrow path at the edge of the woods, that led to the noble family's garden. I reached the entrance panting and my robes were dirty on the hem. I saw some people of the house were outside as well to see what was going on and soon one of them had noticed me and they came running.

„Sister, what happened?“ they called even before they had reached me.

„The oak ... a lightning hit it .. it's burning ... we need help.“

At least I could pretend to have an actual reason why I had come up the mansion. I lifted my head and saw now the young master running to me as well.

„What's wrong?“ he asked, his voice worried, opening the gate.

„A tree caught fire downtown, sir. They need help, we go down there, see what we can do.“ one of the men explained.

„All right.“

They passed me and hurried in the village, heading to where the smoke emerged into the air. I stared after them, honestly praying everyone was still fine and it was just the tree dying.

„Mana, come in, you look terrible.“ the young master said. „I can't let you stay here. Running up here in this weather, you must be crazy.“

I smiled mildly. If it had been him, I knew he would have done the same thing. Together we walked up in the mansion and I was led in the living room, where I

should sit down. It didn't take long until a maid came to me with a blanket and wrapped it around my shivering body. I sank into its warmth and closed my eyes. I was finally where I wanted to be so badly but unrightfully, and I was happy with it. The young master returned soon and he carried a box under his arm. He sat down next to me and put the box aside.

„You're shivering ...“ he whispered quietly, looking in my eyes ever so romantically. I drowned again in his and his lips met mine to warm them. Right here in his arms, caught by the sweetest sin on earth.

„Here, I brought you something.“ he said as the kiss had ended and put the box on my lap. I looked surprised.

„My mother doesn't like it and besides, you need to get out of those.“ he tugged on my soaked robe. Encouraged by his demanding looks, I opened the box to find myself face to face with an amazing red satin dress with beautiful black lace on its hem. Unbelievably, I stood up, letting the box fall on the floor and examining the whole dress and its prettiness.

„I hope you like it.“

„You called me to give me a dress?“ I asked confused, still gazing fascinatedly at the present. The young master laughed.

„No, not only because of the dress. I had to see you again, Mana. But I have told you that already.“

„We're bad children, aren't we?“

„Very bad.“ he chuckled. „Go change. And ...“ - he patted my cornet - „Don't use this again in here, they're used to two-coloured hair, look at my own.“

I stared at him disbelievingly.

„Don't hide your beauty. Make yourself pretty.“

Kapitel 4: Midnight

To be honest, I had never made myself pretty for anyone. All I had ever done was hiding under as much fabric as I could, just to make sure my gender wasn't visible anymore. I was in a very fashionable bathroom, not comparable to the one I knew from the convent, where I changed out of my robe. There was a nice tub, small windows, two golden candleholders left and right from a oval mirror and nice smell of perfume. I liked it. The dress I had been given fit my shape so well, I was scared by it. Along with it there had also been a choker and gloves in the box. Having finished dressing, I watched myself in the mirror, seeing not the shy nun, but a beautiful woman. I bound my hair up high in a ponytail, letting my blond curled tips fall down on the left and the right and for the first time, I didn't feel entirely uncomfortable with it. I watched myself spinning slowly, the movement of the fabric, the movement of my hair. The princess of a fairytale was ready for her beloved prince to be secretly taken into a night's phantasies. My heart was beating twice as quickly, considering the thought of what the young master would possibly do with me. As far as I had taken notice, neither the lady, nor the master was home and except for the maid, I had seen no one. The other two servants had left for helping down in the village. It just seemed perfect. Alone with him ... Quickly I looked once again in the mirror, checking whether my cheeks just felt red or if they were red, but I was lucky.

It took me some more minutes again, until I felt courageous enough to face the young master and the evening with all its possible consequences. But still, I felt a little unsure.

The young master was waiting for me in the living room, sitting by the piano.

„You look stunning.“ he said and my face felt once more like matching my dress. He got up and came over to me and offered me his arm. „If I may, mylady?“

I nodded. Being so embarrassed by the whole situation I was in, I feared I wouldn't be able to say a single word the entire evening. Having linked my arm in his, I was guided to the group of armchairs and instead of offering me a seat, the young master sat down first, but gesturing that I should sit down on his lap. I hesitated, but sat down. Immediately, I was embraced and my body layed on his.

„You're unsure ...“ he whispered in a dark voice, placing a soft kiss on my forehead.

„Sir, I -“

„Kouji. There is no use of formalities anymore.“

I swallowed. „Kouji ... I don't think this is the right place to ...“

„Nobody is here, nobody will be here. It's just you and me.“

If this was good or bad, I couldn't tell, although I knew it already. He could cope with love so easily and I was cramped, mentally and physically. Would he still want me, once he knew the truth?

„Do you like to dance?“ he asked suddenly.

„Dance?“

„Yes. Unfortunately, there's nobody to play music, but it works without as well.“

„Dance without music?“

„Why not? Can you dance?“ he asked. I shook my head. I had learned how to play the pipe organ a little and even how to sing, although I avoided it as much as I could. But never I had had any dance lessons. Nuns weren't supposed to dance.

„It's easy, I could teach you a waltz.“ he said, slapping softly my hip, the sign for me to

get up again. I didn't like being pushed around like this and for that, remained by his side instead of raising. He simply chuckled.

„Maybe later then, hm?“

We sat there a long time, barely talking, just exchanging affectionate gestures and kisses. The world around us was of no importance anymore, all that mattered was the need to know the other close by. My fear became lesser the longer it continued. At some point, even for myself my gender was reduced to a blurry picture. I knew, if this became too intensive, I would inevitably give myself away, but I didn't fully realise the danger, even though it was closer than any time before. I enjoyed the feeling of being desired and seduced, melting in the night's secure black velvet. Kouji held me tightly, caressing my back, my arm, my cheeks ... I was so absorbed in the attraction of the game, I became courageous enough to open my mouth and allow him to invade with his tongue and taste, not only crossing, but exploring what there was to be found beyond the forbidden border of lips. It could lead to anything now...

We were interrupted by the sound of the heavy entrance door. By the emerge of the sound I reflexingly rushed in the air, away from Kouji's lap, looking alarmed from where the sound had come. Kouji instead seemed quite relaxed.

„It's probably just my mother.“ he said, but that didn't quite convince me not be anxious. He got up of the armchair as well, walking through the room to the door, peeking in the corridor outside. I felt so cold with his warmth gone. I heard the voice of the lady and just some seconds later, she entered the living room, let in by her son.

„I have a visitor, mother.“ Kouji explained. I, on the contrary, felt like an open book, I feared she could read everything in my face what Kouji and I had been doing until a barely some minutes ago. „Do you recognize the lady?“ he added cheekily and winked.

„It can't be ...?“ the lady looked quite disbelievingly.

„I told you she'd be perfect for that dress.“

„Sister Mana ...?“ she asked shyly and I confirmed her assumption with a slight nod and the same shyness. „No!... I am speechless.“

I was fluttered by her words and embarrassed. The lady came closer again. „I can't say how incredible you look! This is so amazing!“

„Mother, you'll make her blush.“

„Sister ... Lady Mana, I have a request.“ she addressed me. I was called a lady ... „I would ask you to let me paint a portrait of you. Just like this. I want to ban your beauty on a canvas.“

„Mylady ... an honour ...“ It was all I could say. Kouji came over to my side.

„Speechless, lady Mana?“ he tried to annoy me with a smile on his lips.

I nodded.

Now it was the lady's turn to chuckle. „You've made a perfect match.“

„I beg your pardon?“ I asked surprised, addressing the lady.

„Mana, I forgot to tell ... my mother, well, she knows about us.“

„What?!“ Now I was definitely speechless. And I felt betrayed, to say the least.

„Please, forgive him.“ the lady told me in a soft voice. „He's my son ... I know him since his birth. It was not difficult for me to guess that he seemed to have fallen in love rather unhappily about a week ago, maybe.“

„My mother kept bugging me with it.“ Kouji continued to explain in a soft voice. „The day after your sister's death, she confronted me directly with her suspect and I admitted she was right. But you can trust my mother. She will never let anyone know, I swear it.“

I was anything else than convinced.

„Why didn't you tell me?“ I said though clenched teeth, not hiding my displeasure.

„When should I have done?“ Kouji tried to defend himself.

„What about after I entered this house?“ I backfired with angry eyes. Who did he think he was to tell someone that I was having an affair with him, no matter if it was a friend, a relative or anybody else. I was risking everything with it, for me this was nothing I could take that easily.

„Please, don't argue.“ the lady tried worriesomely. „Lady Mana, I know what this means for you. It must be difficult for you and by all my faith in God, I would never betray the woman my son has fallen in love with. Please, don't be angry with him. If you want, be angry with me.“

„We better discuss this in my room, Mana.“ Kouji said to me, looking guilty.

„Discuss what, we have nothing to discuss or is there still something I don't know about yet?“ My anger did not flow away. Why had he done this to me?

„Mana, please ... let me talk to you upstairs.“ he tried again.

I stared for a little time at him, then: „Fine.“

Whatever he was going to tell me, I doubted it would make less angry. I followed him to the second floor, along a wide corridor, full with paintings, but this time there were no landscapes but all sorts of portraits of different people. I was surprised to see not only noble looking people but also children, an elderly couple, a young boy in hospital with a broken leg and a young woman with a beautiful, yet dirty face and who looked like a whore.

„My mother has a good heart.“ Kouji told me, seeing I stopped by the portrait of the whore. „She has protraited all these different people and even more, if someone's portrait is sold, she gives the money to them.“

„I didn't know ...“ I answered, fascinated by the portrait. The woman had a very self-confident pose, making no big deal of what she was, she showed it openly and yet, her eyes told all the disgrace and pain she had gone through. It was simply amazing to notice all those emotions and to catch them so vividly as the lady could.

„That woman was called Eliza.“ Kouji told me. „A very strong personality.“

„A whore ...“

„Yes. She had pride, although she had to do such an unthankful job.“

„She had...?“

„We never knew what happenend to her. Someday, she was gone. She always talked about breaking the chains and becoming free.“

„You have talked a lot to her ...“

„I was 16, just a boy. I was with my mother when she painted her.“

„And after?“ I asked.

„It doesn't matter.“ He took my hand and looked me in the eyes. „You're here now, isn't it enough?“

I didn't reply, I was still angry.

„Come on“

After we entered Kouji's room, I took a seat on the chaise longue and he joined me. I refused to look at him directly, so I let my eyes travel through the room. Kouji's room was just looking comfortable and welcoming.

„Mana ... I'm sorry, but what do you blame me for?“ Kouji finally took the word. „When I came home from the council, I was heartbroken. You had sent me away, I couldn't know I would be lucky in the end ... so I told my mother.“

He was right. I had said we would not meet again and he had every reason to feel hurt, just as I had done.

„But that doesn't explain why she knows we're in a relationship.“

„I asked her for help.“

My eyes narrowed and focused on a leg of the table opposite to us.

„She wasn't in the church by chance to paint the windows. We hoped to get to see you sometime. Please forgive, I got worried about you, because I didn't see you in town after that day.“

He laid his head on my shoulder, cuddling. „I love you ...“ he whispered and kissed my neck. Stubbornly, I got up.

„Kouji, I'll lose everything with this.“

He just stared after me, as I walked to the balcony door, gazing outside in the wide black. „I'll even lose you.“ I said and crossed my arms tightly around my body.

„What are you saying? Why should you lose me, I'm here!“ he protested.

„Because I'm a liar. What you see is not what I am ... You've fallen in love with a lie ...“ I was going to tell him. I could not be foolish enough to make myself believe he would ever love me once he had found out. I wasn't strong, I did hide myself, afraid of humans, guided by the fear the truth caused. My heart was pierced with pain, and pieces seemed to break out of it every second I stood longer there.

„What are you talking about...?“ he asked me confusedly. I heard him getting up.

I turned to face him. My hands still clenched in my arms, the words were so simple and yet I did not know how to tell him. Lowering my head, I closed my eyes. It would not only be my heart scattered into fragments by the end of this. His would lay right next to it, for he had confessed already that he loved me.

When I opened my eyes again, his face was only centimeters away from mine, I could feel his breath and it laced my throat.

„You're saying you're not what I believe to see ... then I wonder what you think I am seeing.“ he said in a soothing voice, sliding his hands up and down my shoulders gently. „Let me tell you, then.“

He breathed in and out heavily, avoiding my eyes. „What I see is a beautiful and good-hearted person, shy, but lovely. Preferring to hide to avoid troubles, but reliable and faithful. But I think it's not me, who you're not honest to. You are not honest to yourself, Mana.“

He paused a moment. I was glad he was holding me, I was so sick in my mind, in my heart.

„You have a reason to be dishonest to yourself, Mana ... you're a man.“

I breathed in sharply and closed my eyes. He knew it. He had known it all the time.

„Tell me the truth, Mana ... are you?“ he whispered to me, a little impatiently.

When had I made the mistake and revealed it? I was paying attention constantly ...

„Mana ...?“ he asked once more, sounding worried, maybe he thought he pushed me too much. But I bit my lip and nodded, I had been up to tell him anyway ... he would never look at me again. What would he think? A man who disguised himself as a woman. A man who even had become a nun. And a man, who had fallen in love with another ... He would not forgive me ... and God wouldn't, either.

„Please, don't hate me ...“ I said, my voice trembling. I fought with tears. „I didn't intend to deceive you ...“

„Hate you ...“ he repeated, but instead of pushing me away, I was captured by his arms again, held tightly and cheek to cheek with him. „I could never hate you ...“

„How do you know?“ I asked. I had to know. If others had noticed it as well ...

„Many little things.“ he told me and my heart sank. I clinged to him stronger than I did anyway and he did as well, noticing how much I was affected by it. „Your hands ... I saw

them only once without gloves. It was the day we met first. Small, pretty, but no woman's hands. Of course, I didn't waste a thought on you being a man right away, but I remembered them."

I nodded against his chest.

„Then your voice. It's not unusual that some women have deep voices, too, but—"

„I hate my voice." I interrupted him. It was the only thing I could not veil entirely and that I had to use everyday again. Kouji kissed my cheek compassionately.

„It doesn't matter. You have a pleasant voice."

He was so nice ... I did not want to let him go after this would be over. Was love always so painful? I don't even know now. Our love was doomed before it began, all we had was one night. One night and not even that, it was after midnight when the nightmare broke loose and that we were drowning in the blood-red sea of hell.

Kouji let me know that despite of the sound of my voice and my unfeminine hands there would have been one reason, he simply could not have missed for having embraced me so many times until then: I had no breasts. I had not wasted a thought on how flat my chest was, I had always worried more because of what there was to be found between my legs. He looked at me after he told me, seeing my puzzled face because of my sheepishness and laughed slightly, kissing me several times playfully and I only became more irritated. Putting my hand between our mouths I made him stop.

„What ...?" he wanted to know, apparently not seeing where my problem with this was.

„Aren't you shocked?"

He laughed more. „Mana, didn't you listen? I admit I was never sure if you really were a man or if my phantasy played tricks on me, but since we embraced the first time, I was expecting it. I felt a little awkward about it, yes, but by the time I realised I had fallen in love with you nevertheless, what should I have done? It's just happened, and I don't regret it. I want to be with you."

I couldn't believe what I had heard him say. How could this be? Didn't he think I was mad?

„Sorry ..." I mumbled. „I just can't understand why you still want me ..."

„Why shouldn't I want you anymore?" he posed the question, but he answered to question for us both. „This is not about rules, moral or laws, Mana. It's only about the feeling of love two people, like us, share. I don't know why you decided to live the life of a nun, but I'm sure you had your reasons ..."

„Does your mother know that, too?" I asked bitterly.

„You being a man? No, she's too obsessed by the idea of having a daughter-in-law soon, I won't crash her hopes. And most of all, I won't put you in danger, never."

A piece broke from the lumb in my throat, at least my biggest secret was safe. Only he and me would know ...

„Have you ever thought of it?"

„Thought of what?"

„Quitting your life as a nun."

I had not. But then, I never had a reason to do so. Being a nun was the safest profession out there for me and I had always wished to be a good child, until one day I realised I would never be one and then decided to become a nun to make up for the sin I was committing. But was I really making up or just calming my conscience by it? Or was it the society, that made me feel like a sinner, sentenced guilty and being sent to hell after my death? I was confused, maybe the newly gained feelings caused the troubles and my faith did not seem as strong as before. I had given in too easily; here I

was, being told I would be honestly loved by a man and appreciating it, although it would cost our both lives if truth one day came to light for having broken my vow to God.

Kouji was stroking my back slowly up and down, the silky fabric tickling my skin a little. Enjoying the sensation, I shut my eyes, wishing that for this evening I would have to think anymore. I answered his affection, embracing him willingly, offering more access to kiss my neck. His grip was getting stronger and I was lifted just a few centimeters from the ground, carried to his bed where he laid me down. I sank into the soft blankets and pillows as much as in his touches, his kisses and his love. Continuing what we had been doing in the living room before, I was soon confronted with the feeling of lust, wiping reason away. I shivered in anticipation to feel, to taste, to love and Kouji gave it all to me and I let myself fall, becoming his with body and soul.

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 cornet, 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 bobbing 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 wether 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 build in the fields, watching over the town and its habitants. 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 it's 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 wether 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 pocess 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 hesistating.“ 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. Wether 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 ...

Kapitel 6: The Purgatory

The sound of the door pushed open hastily.

„Run away!“*

A desperate call.

„Got you!“ „Witch!“ „There she is!“*

Angry cries of vengeance.

„You are disguised as if belonging to a convent!“*

Firm grips on my arms. Pulled roughly away from the altar. Out of the chapel. Raging people, white flags with crosses, batted by wooden sticks. A glimpse of you.

They sentenced me to burn on the cross.

I was charged to have murdered Mary, sister Catherine, the lady and the maid, accused of being a witch, sneaking as such into a convent and being a traitor of God.

I did not listen to the stories they came up with, how and why I could have done all that and if something did not fit, they said I had used witchcraft. Kouji was not allowed to attend my trial that was held the same day they caught me. I saw Great Sister Ann with disgust in her face, the mother of Mary cursing me, the old man from the church claiming to have known it all the time, since I had not seemed affected by sister Catherine's death and my other sisters were making me responsible for the lightning that had hit the tree in order to flee and to murder again.

In all the battling before I was put into trial, my robes and cornet had been torn apart by the people, not only revealing my hair, but also my flat chest and thus my gender, what caused them to bark away in shock, stopping the humiliation violently done to my body. For now being exposed entirely I was convicted unfailably as a witch of the Devil, they cried.

It was shortly after the ringing of the bell that let me know it was 6 o'clock in the evening that they came to execute me. I had been locked in the vault under the church after my sentence had been completed, listening to the sound of hammers and saws, that were building my cross. I did not complain. Through the whole process I had barely spoken, of what use would it have been to defend myself. I just waited for it all to end.

They bound ropes to each of my knuckles so tight they cut into my skin even through the fabric of gloves. I had been given a simple, black dress before the trial and I was still wearing it, it should be my death's robe as well. Black, as my soul, they had laughed at me. By the time I was lead out of the church, the habitants were neither shouting nor shrieking. In anticipation they watched me passing quietly, walking away, departing from them to the place that had been chosen to become my grave. Only a few men and women followed us. We arrived soon in a nice spot with only a few trees around, high straw and grass and some bushes. My cross was laying in its middle sacredly and there was a hole in the ground before it's longer beam. I was pulled to the cross and made lay down on it, my arms got bound to either side with the robes that had already caught my hands. My heart was beating quicker and made me feel sick, once the cross and I were raised in the vertical, sinking a little in the ground. While still hold upright by other ropes, two men started fixing it on the ground and gathering wood sticks and wood sharvings to distribute them all around me. I just heard them perparing, my gaze was at the sky, that was clear again, with

only some little clouds at the horizon.

„Mana!“

My heart sank. I did not even dare to look down. He had come. He would see me burn. I did not want him to be here and yet I could not prevent to feel a strange, heavy happiness inside me to hear his voice again.

„Boy! What you're doing here?“

„Let her go, she's innocent!“

„You're talking nonsense, she's the murderer of your mother!“

„Maybe she has bewitched you, too, sir.“

„That's not the place for you to be right now, go back home!“

„Mana!“ you addressed me. I could not look in your eyes, if I did, maybe my faith got broken. I would not let it happen once again, my heart was breaking, yes, but what was it worth, the demons were lurking already to devour it.

„Mana!“

Please don't watch this.

„Please!“

„Stay away, your bothering us!“

„The witch must burn, she's the origin of our losses!“

„I won't go! Mana!“

Please go home ... go home and forget about me.

„Someone get hold of him! Maybe she's using witchcraft to make him free her!“

„Let go of me, just listen! She is innocent!“

Just get him away ... I can't stand it.

„Young master, you wouldn't want us to lay hands on you!“

„Why don't you -“

You were beaten and they grapped you. I heard you struggling.

„Someone get the fire, quickly, before we're all bewitched!“

Yes, please proceed, let it end, but bring him away ... he is not supposed to suffer even more ...

„Mana ...“

I raise my gaze pleadingly to heavens above me. Release us ...

Crackling of purgatory.

Rotten apples thrown. Accusing choirs of innocent hymns.

Torn apart in twilight, a maze of human emotions we cannot hold.

The beauty on the cross, awaiting the raise of darkness.

The white skin, a blossoming blood-red rose of sinnery.

The time to fade is now.

I saw the sky changing. Dark clouds, I heard thunder crashing and lightning was blending me. Heavy rain fell and I felt his presence. The Devil had heard my prayers ... Hell had chosen me to be forsaken and Heaven had refused that I should be forgiven. The stage was set before my eyes.

My executioners escaped in fear and there he was ... appeared out of nowhere, hovering in the air right in front of me.

„My dear ...“ he whispered pityfully, touching my cheeks and his skin was so cold like being death in person, I shuddered under his touches, that were so icy and still so gentle ...

„Come with me.“ he told me, eyeing me as if I was a lost lover. I closed my eyes, layed

my head down on his shoulder ... let me die ... extinguish my existence ...

I moaned tonelessly as his sharp teeth set into my skin, an undefinable lust spreading though my whole body and although being caught by it I desired more. I did not want him to stop sucking from me, he should get all I had running through my veins ... all of it, my blood and my life ...

He stopped.

My head lulled on his shoulder again. Eyes wide open, I was panting, longing for him, struggling against the ropes that hold me, I wanted to embrace him, cling to him, he was my only desire ...

„Drink from me and live forever.“ he continued whispering generously and suddenly I could hear the sound of my blood rushing through his body, arousing me so much I got mad by it. I was freed from the cross, falling in his arms and softly we landed on the ground. Greedily I watched him cut his knuckle with a knife, droplets of blood falling on my face, I tried to catch them with my tongue and he looked pleased at me, offering me the source of lusting. Hastily I bit him, regaining the pleasure, drowning in an ecstasy beyond all my experiences and once having reached the climax, I fainted.

Caught between the crevice of delusion and reality.

I had lost it all. Memories, all that's left in my ruined and dissolute mind.

I had become a creature of the night. My body had lost its life and remained still here, carrying me through the ridicule nihilism, I dissipate in solitary.

From the yonder of darkness I look back to the time I was a human being. I dwell in eternity of time, that is ticking away endlessly.

Remembering, Reminding.

Reminisce.

Incircled by the shadows around me that bind me to the life I have to live,

I wish everything would collapse and scatter away

Recall, Recollect.

Reminisce.

* = Corrected sentences taken from the movie