

Merciless Shadows

By: kremesch

I've been tracking him for years, now.

He's constantly on the move, due to his work, and Rufus never tells him until the last minute where he's going or why. He's never even told when he'll return.

But I suppose it's trivial, since he's a Turk, and I suppose scheduling him to return would simply be a waste of the President's resources. After all, there's always a chance that he'll never return, and it wouldn't make much sense to assume that he would.

The Turks...

Out of the four of them, I'd have to say that Tseng is probably the biggest handful, and the worst to set up chase with.

It's easy to see why he became the head of the department, given his stoic exterior and inability to see anything wrong with anything he does. He's deadly, and full of misleading information. But he's also intelligent, and observant to a fault.

And by fault, I mean, the man possesses an outright, insane, ability to find fault in everything.

From a microscopic dent in a crystal glass, to a small piece of lint where it doesn't belong, he'll have to pick at it. He'll even go so far as to refuse to drink out of it.

And don't get me started on his arrogance. The man's a typical Turk, he does and says things without thinking of the impact on those he says and does them to. Even his sense of humour, if you could call it that, is biting and sarcastic.

In many ways, he's become my attribution, and the constant chase is only part of it.

It started when I rescued him and Elena from the remnants. Of course, his version of the story would be different from my own. But no one expects him to tell the truth, so I actually win one against him on this one.

Tseng...

He's a bastard son with charcoal eyes, charcoal hair, and skin nearly as pale as cream. He had his forehead marked by a religious cult, just so he could do his job by getting closer to their leader. Looking at him, you'd never know that he came from a poor family, and you'd never guess that he has a younger sister that he cherishes and dotes over as if she meant the world to him. But the most amusing aspect about him, above all, is that the man is still his mother's little boy.

In fact, looking at him now, as he impersonates someone he's not, while staging a deal in Costa Del Sol and looking cool and slick when everyone else is sweating and fanning themselves, you'd never even guess the man was human.

But he is. He prides himself on that sort of thing. It goes with his dark sense of humour.

And speaking of humour, not even so much as a tiny quirk to the corner of his mouth escapes, when he's discovered and he turns to the woman beside him and says. "I would have shot my hairdresser if I were you." Then he turns to the man across from him and tells him that. "I recall kidnapping a man, several years back, that looked just like you... We sent him to our science department for experimental study."

And to add the icing on the cake, because he no longer cares, he quirks his brow and remains stone-faced. "You wouldn't happen to have lost a son... Would you?"

I can only assume one thing as I shake my head and think about how distasteful he is, even though I don't fully understand why I'm smiling about it, and I won't dare state my thoughts on the matter. He's on a job, and the proof is in the fact that he is the only one left standing after a short period of appearing to have done nothing.

After that, he stands in typical, Tseng, style, and slicks his hair back with the palm of his hand and tidies up his suit, as if he's just finished having breakfast and was preparing for the rest of the day. Then he picks up the drink he ordered before he completed his job and finishes the remainder of it off, and states "Pay dirt" as if it's a ritual, before walking out as if everything about his life is completely ordinary.

He knows I track him, and he turns it into a game...

But like everything else he does, there's a routine involved.

The first thing he does when he walks out, is wink in my direction. He does it to let me know that he's nobody's fool, and he'll do it each time he steps outside to remind me. The second thing he'll do, is remain blatantly obvious about where he is and what he's doing, and on the last day of every job, after it's done, he'll buy the most expensive keepsake he can find and have it sent to his mother, along with a post card.

He never dares to do it during the job, because he'd never dare give his location away. But the Mother's boy in him simply can't resist letting her know he's okay.

Then he'll buy himself something local and sickly-sweet as a reward for a job well-done. The man loves his sweets and homes in on them as if his life depends on it. But he always saves the sweetest things for last.

It's something I've come to learn about him, over the years, and it's always something that makes me shake my head.

The last thing he'll do, and this part always varies, depending on the party involved, is round up his troops. But just like he has a routine with me, he has a routine for each of them too.

With Elena, who is the small and blonde female, and his usual partner, he'll either chastise her on the fact that he felt she could have done better on the job and that he highly suspected the reason her performance was poor, was because she talks too much. Or he'll act like a tourist and kiss her on the cheek to convince the crowds that they're a married couple, and he'll keep up that façade until their alone, where he'll proceed to chastise her.

And Elena usually takes it personally, because the woman has a crush on him, although, for the life of me, I can't figure out why.

With Reno, who is the lanky redhead, who never does up his shirt, leans on anything he's standing or sitting near, and had his face tattooed to cover up the scars from a snowboarding accident, he'll generally chastise for not focusing on the proper task and endangering his partner. Then he'll openly stare the man up and down, before he'll comment on the disrespectful appearance the man insists on exhibiting.

But Reno never listens, because he's second in command, and he knows where his value lays.

Then there's Rude, the bald Turk who never removes his shades, and towers over everyone by at least a head. His interaction with Rude always amuses me, because out of all of them, the big man actually stumps Tseng. About the only thing wrong Tseng can find with Rude, is that he's partnered with Reno, and that's not really a fault of Rude's. But he'll use it anyway, since it's the best he's got. He'll manage to use some sort of insane instance that Reno did that Rude should have been aware of or looking out for.

And like Reno, Rude never listens either, because the man knows Reno is his superior, and there's no way that Tseng could honestly expect the big guy to exercise any form of authority over the man.

Once he's managed to get all of that out of his system, he'll convince himself that he did it to make them all better, while they all, angrily, leave. Then Tseng will manage to disappear in the crowds somewhere, reminding me once again, that the only reason I got to see what he was doing was because he wanted me to.

How it all started, why it started, or even when, begins to elude me, and I find myself mercilessly trying to pick up his trail again, and I realise, I'm doing exactly what he wants me to do, whether I want to admit to it or not. At times, I almost think to myself, that I never should have saved him when I found him and Elena in the Lost Forest in the first place, because ever since that day, he's become my angel of retribution.

Always baiting, always luring, and forever tempting, only to bite and sting with words and actions when the trap closes. He's twisted me into something I never was, and he's moulded me into something I never thought I would be.

He's hell incarnate.

And I follow.

I follow like a dedicated minion, and I follow him right to Icicle Inn.

There he is, stoking a fire with a strange smile on his face, as I stand in the shadows of the shivering cold, knowing that he knows I'm here, and knowing that he'll do nothing about it unless he feels like it.

Though, this time, he does. He walks to the balcony doors and opens them wide. Then he looks directly at me, with that daring glint he must have mastered somewhere in his youth, assuming he wasn't born with it, and then he disappears from my sight while leaving the doors open in invitation.

Two can play though, I remind myself. I try to convince myself that he doesn't know me as well as he thinks he does, and I try to convince myself that there is no invisible leash pulling me forward.

And as I fight with myself, I find myself standing at the gates of hell, or as Tseng would say. "For Gaia's sake, Vince, it's not like you're at the gates to hell. Either come in or leave. Someone might see you."

He thinks he knows me so well...

And I take note that he mentions nothing of the cold.

All I can do is grit my teeth and lower my head, as I take a reluctant step forward and behold the fact that he rarely settles for mediocre, while I take a look at the golden trimmings and the richly coloured walls and pray for some kind of rabid beast to devour me, so I'll have no choice but to turn away, as I mutter with a slight frustration. "Vincent."

I hate it when people shorten my name, especially when it's him.

"I'm not calling you that." He boldly states, as he steps out of a bathroom you could fit a whole family in, and finishes tying the black, flowing, robe he changed into.

Of course not; it's too many syllables for him to waste his precious breath on.

Then he stares me over as I do everything in my power to avoid returning the attention, and he quirks his brow before he brushes the snow off my shoulder. And the moment he reaches over to close the door, I lose control and I grab him.

Like the animal he wants me to be, I grab him, roughly, by the arm and allow the claws of my gauntlet to dig in, while I kick the doors closed and escort him to the wall while inhaling his cologne. He knows I hate this, and he feeds it with all of my weaknesses. Every scent he wears, from his shampoo to his soap, he deliberately picks because he knows I like them. Every look and touch that he gives...

Even his biting tongue makes me feel a way I don't want to feel, and he continues to do it. It's almost like he needs to do it as much as I need him to stop doing it. But like myself, he doesn't want to admit it.

"Your gauntlet is digging into my arm." He coolly states. Yet, he makes no attempt to pull away or even act like it hurts; he simply states it to exert his will. "Take it off if you insist on grabbing me like that."

"No." I tell him, to let him know that he doesn't control me entirely, and I wind up placing my tongue in his mouth the moment he tries to retort.

And quickly, he forgets that he was going to say anything at all, and I think about how easy it would be to strangle him at that moment, freeing us both, as he relaxes and his hands wander to the buckles on my clothes.

But I don't. Instead, I take off the damn gauntlet and find my bare hands wandering to find a less troublesome path through the openings in his robe, and feel heated when he's managed to beat me with the task on his end. All I can think is that the man must practice in his sleep, and I moan while he mutters. "Suck me."

"No." I tell him, wondering why he still even bothers to ask, as I find what I'm looking for and run my fingers over the smooth skin and listen to his breath change. "I told you from the start, I don't do that."

He doesn't ask again. He never does. Instead, he finds his way to the chain around my neck and manages to remove it without hiding his distaste over the fact that Lucrecia gave it to me, and tosses it on the floor. And to let him know I disapprove, I turn him around and push him against the wall, hard enough to make him grunt.

"Take it easy... It's been over a month."

"I know." I tell him, as I place my fingers inside and listen to him hiss while he grips into the brick of the fireplace. "It was over a month ago that I woke up to find you gone."

"I was called ow-out." Then he pants and mutters with his eyes closed. "Is that why you're acting like you'd like to strangle me?"

"Your mother paid you a visit." I let him know, before I pull my hand away and push him over to the bed. "While I was still sleeping in your bed."

"That's not good." He muses, before he does his best to hide his panic about his mother finding out, and turns around to face me and asks. "What did you tell her?"

"I told her I was house-sitting."

After he thinks about it for a moment, he quirks his brow and then smiles as if he approves. Of course, he'll never admit to it, though, and he'll never apologise either.

Instead, he pulls me closer and scoots further onto the bed to assist me while muttering. "Hopefully, she believed you."

I suppose, for his sake, a small part of me does too. But I'm not about to tell him that, as I push him onto his side and lay down behind him.

"Go slow..." He cautions, as he places his hand against the front of my hip as if he's about to push me away if I don't listen. Then he proceeds to tell me. "Perhaps you'd have a better feel for what this is like if you'd reverse the roles every now and then."

"I thought you liked it." I whisper, as his hair gets caught in my mouth and the palms of my hands get a feel for his slender sides and hips.

"I do..." He mutters, before he squirms slightly and lets me know exactly how far I can go by the resistance of the push from his hand. "But it would be better if you didn't act like I was impervious to pain... Perhaps if you knew..."

Then his hand eases up slightly and he lets me enter further while I take advantage of it and heed his words by being cautious. But there's still no way in hell I'd ever let him show me what it's like, and I tell him. "It will never happen."

But to be honest, a part of me does want to know, mostly because I think he's right, even though I don't fully understand why either of us are doing what we're doing in the first place. And when I see the way that he grits his teeth, digs his fingers, and pants with a slight whine, I feel a slight fear and wonder why he's letting me do this. I wonder why I'm letting myself do this.

And like a broken record, I'm wondering how it happened in the first place.

With a sense of guilt, I place my hand where I've been neglecting him. It's no worse than masturbation, I tell myself, and at this point, I'll do anything to help alleviate what I'm doing to him, and I close my eyes and bury my face in his neck to drown away my shame.

He's told me, before, that he doesn't really like the things that he likes.

Despite the contextual confusion, I understood what he meant. I know he didn't mean for it to make me feel guilty, though. But it's all I can think about whenever I touch him, and a part of me feels like I'm taking advantage of him, because I know it's a weakness.

And I feel worse, the moment he climaxes. Because I know I'm nowhere close yet, and that only reminds me that he'll have nothing left to alleviate the physical violation I've become.

He won't say a word to me though, and he won't ask me to stop. Instead, he'll do what he always does. He'll cling to the mattress with whitening knuckles while silently praying for it to end soon.

He'll never admit that he prays for it. But I know that he does.

And it only gets worse from here, because in an attempt to answer his prayer, I quicken my pace and thrust deeper, making him nearly cry out as he shuts his eyes, tight, while I curse my existence and hope I can end it for both of us soon.

But thanks to what Hojo did to me, it takes me longer. Although, I doubt that was his intention.

When it's done, he attempts to pull away. But I place my hands on his hips and pull him closer while muttering out. "No..."

He doesn't fight or protest. He doesn't say anything at all. It's been a month and he understands that I just want to hold him. So, he relaxes and snuggles into me while I try to spit out another stray hair.

Then he smiles while still panting and places his hand atop mine as I mindlessly wander it about his body. He tries to intertwine his fingers with mine and finally wins while he states. "I was beginning to think you weren't going to come after me this time."

"Thinking or hoping." I ask him, as I take a good look at his red and swollen shoulder and frown about it.

"Both."

I remain silent, because I know he really means it, even though he doesn't really mean it the way he says it, and I lightly place a kiss on the spot where I suspect the wound originated, as if it will make up for my weakness, and mutter. "I would if I could."

It would have been easy for me to say that I watch him because I worry about him, and it would have been easy for me to say that I never intended to fall slave to him. But keeping the words minimal just makes more sense.

In the morning, he panics when he hears the room service tap on his door and enter the antechamber to his room. Of course, panic, to Tseng, is nothing more than grabbing his robe and throwing the blankets over my head to hide the fact that I exist.

Although the reason eludes me, considering we're in a separate room.

And after the last of his black robe flows away and the door closes, I push the blanket to my waist and sit up. I wait for the sound of servants to disappear, and I wait for the sound of silence, before I hear Tseng remove the lids from the plates and inspect the hearty breakfast he ordered when he checked in.

Whether I'm invited or not, I grab a robe supplied by the hotel and remind myself that he never asked me to leave. The robe is starchy, and the lack of colour blends with my skin. But it's not my intention to find anything flattering, and I find myself in the foyer with all the windows heavily draped.

I'm sure it's a beautiful day, and I'm sure he'd like to let the light in.

But there are some things he'd rather not let out.

He stands there and looks stoic, as he motions to the food as an invitation for me to enter and join him. And I take note that he ordered enough for two.

He nods when I accept. Then he carefully sits as if he aches and avoids looking at me while he pours us both a cup of tea, before smothering his with an unhealthy amount of sugar.

We keep our distance, and we keep our silence, until he finally nods again and informs me in a softening tone while he stares at the floor. "I've booked this place for a week." Then he brushes his silken hair back, that looks immaculate even though he just woke up, and tries to meet my eyes, even though he has trouble doing it. "I was hoping you might want to stay here, with me, for the duration."

He says it like he doesn't really want to say it, even though he says it. So, I nod and move over to the seat he's sitting on. But I don't touch him. Instead, I lean toward the food and grab myself a plate while I try to make sense out of our pairing, my retribution.

He flirts when I'm at a distance, and closes me off when we're close. He's always inviting, and he's always willing...

As long as I remain in the shadows.
Whether I love him, I don't know.
Whether I need him, it's grown merciless.
Whether I hate him...
I'll always lie and say yes.