

Crown the Villain

Volume II:

Bullet and Blade

D. Sharon

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Table of Contents

[Map of Alataria](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Demilan I](#)

[Edward I](#)

[Arkaneh I](#)

[Lunarey I](#)

[Demilan II](#)

[Edrimer I](#)

[Arkaneh II](#)

[Maileena I](#)

[Edward II](#)

[Edrimer II](#)

[Lunarey II](#)

[Arkaneh III](#)

[Maileena II](#)

[Edward III](#)

[Lunarey III](#)

[Arkaneh IV](#)

[Maileena III](#)

[Edrimer III](#)

[Edward IV](#)

[Lunarey IV](#)

[Arkaneh V](#)

[Maileena IV](#)

[Demilan III](#)

[Maileena V](#)

[Edrimer IV](#)

[Edward V](#)

[Lunarey V](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Appendix](#)

Map of Alataria



Author's Note

The character segments in this series don't necessarily happen in chronological order by their order of appearance. Some of them may happen at the same time as others, as well as before or after.

Also, the segments can also take place over a period of minutes, hours, days and even weeks, and the amount of time that goes by between each segment of a character can also be minutes, hours, days or weeks.

Prologue

After about an hour of waiting, the sedative finally started to wear off, as the woman finally opened her eyes from her long sleep. A man was standing on top of her, looking with lustful eyes, a broad grin smeared over his face and lips anointed with his own saliva. "Finally," he whispered to himself. His hand twitched with excitement.

The woman was naked, lying on the cold, hard floor, with her hands spread across, like a crucified figure. He had to make sure her clothes won't get in the way, and that she was placed in a position most comfortable for him to work with. She looked in horror at the man. Her eyes were filled with fright, her pupils trembled, yet she couldn't say a word, as she was still under the effect of the paralyzing medication he gave her. She couldn't speak. She couldn't move. She could only watch as he hindered closer with a scalpel, looking mad and bloodthirsty.

"I-I-I've been waiting for you to w-w-wake up," He said with his slightly high-pitched voice. "I-I-I've been patient. I-I-I've been watching you for an hour. I h-h-held myself from d-d-doing anything to you." His stuttering was not a result of a talking defect, but rather an effect of his excitement and rejoices. "I-I-I know what to do. S-S-Stop telling me what to do." He seemed to be talking to another person. The woman moved her eyes around, but saw that no one else was there. He was talking to thin air. "S-S-Stop pressuring me," he kept saying to the invisible person. "Y-Y-You're always p-p-

Bullet and Blade

pressuring me." His rambles only made her fear grow.

The woman lay still on the floor, yet he could notice the growing fear in her eyes. He had no mercy for her. He felt no sort of sympathy or hesitation for what he was about to do to her. All he felt was an eager burst to do the horrible things that he had already done to many more of his victims.

He sent down the scalpel into her eyeball, at first slowly, and then faster, until the thin razor was halfway through in her skull. A splash of blood gushed at the man's face. She didn't make a sound. She only lay there, doomed to feel the excruciating pain without having the privilege of screaming. And she wanted to scream so badly. Her mind was begging to let the world know of her pain, as boiling waves of pain and burn sliced through her. He continued to poke the scalpel around until the eyeball looked damaged enough to him. At that point, he pushed his fingers into her eye socket and furiously pulled the mangled eyeball. The waves of pain intensified. She no longer wanted to scream. She wanted to die.

That night was the longest, most painful one the woman has ever suffered in her entire life. Even all the cuts and bruises she ever received in her lifetime combined weren't a match for the kind that she felt at those moments. The man continued his grizzly act as he went on to pull her other eyeball in the same manner, and then using a saw, he cut off her arms from her torso. Lastly, he dug into her chest using the scalpel and took out her heart.

His eyes shone as he looked at the final outcome. Once, he was an honest, hard-working man with a family, but now his life was filled with nothing but madness and blood.

The Grimm Brothers story told about three surgeons, who each lost a body part. Eyes, arms, and heart. For that reason, the people of Alataria named him the Tri-Surgeon.



Demilan

Ashcote's central bus station was heavily crowded and boisterous. People were running around constantly as if they were waves coming and going, ever keeping the ocean that was the bus station rumbling. Stores and stands, mainly of food, scattered around, looking to bring in whatever coin would come in their way in those desperate days of poverty.

Demilan saw the place from a positive point of view, preferring to appreciate the cleanliness and lack of any graffiti of mob gang dictums. It felt like a nice change compared to everything he had seen so far in that city. Having spent most of his life in Exumber, he started missing his old hometown, as by now he had grown weary of Ashcote and its overbearing presence of Men of Midas members. Surely, the golden thugs were present in Exumber as well, but everyone knew that Code Sanguinary were the ruling force in that city.

He sat on a bench next to Maileena, reading the country's leading newspaper, *The Heart of the Country*, with the side-purpose of hiding his and Maileena's face behind it. His eyes were red with fatigue and his body was still weak from the rehabilitation process. His fingers slightly trembled as he held the paper. The black duffel bag rested on the bench right beside him, with all of his weapons hidden in it, including his black knife. Maileena had a small bag next to her as well,

Bullet and Blade

packed with some food and water. She insisted on keeping her revolver hidden in the back of her pants, concealed under her black jacket, instead of being put away in the bag.

Maileena looked nervous. She was constantly biting her lower lip and clenching and flexing her hands.

"Relax," Demilan said to her.

"Don't tell me to relax. We're very wanted people by now, Demilan. We shouldn't be in such a crowded place." She was incensed. "What are we even doing here?"

"Let me show you." Demilan rifled through the newspaper, flipping through various articles. One article was about the possible candidate to go against Gerald Conrad for the next presidential elections, Roger Strickland, an up and coming political figure who's long been rumored to be seeking the throne of the Segregated Quarter. Another article was about a famous pop singer's upcoming album, soon to be released by Golden Key Records, owned by Reus Mallistrom. Demilan's eyes narrowed as he read the name. *And the evils prosper...* he thought.

After going through those pages, he finally found the article he was looking for. "That's why we're here." He showed Maileena the paper. The headline was written in big, bold letters: "The Deserter General Goes Free," accompanied by a picture of Charles Blackburn below it. Dressed in orange uniform and handcuffed, the old ringleader had a surly expression. The article went on to describe how the trial, which took place behind closed doors, ended with Blackburn's exoneration over a technicality. It didn't specify which technicality it was, adding that the police refused to give away any information about it to the press. The next day, the bodies of 3 people were thrown at APD's station doors in Morth City, Fallhalt. The ones of the judge, state attorney and lead investigator of the case. *Code Sanguinary may have died down over these past few years, but Blackburn's still got it.*

"What is this? Why are you showing me this article?" Maileena asked.

"Blackburn is free, so now we're going to get to Exumber,

D. Sharon

where his outpost is, and ask for some help."

"Are you insane? Did you forget that Blackburn kicked you out of Code Sanguinary for taking Vex? Why would he help you?"

"I wouldn't go through all this trouble and risk if I wasn't sure of this plan. Trust me, the Code Sanguinary outpost is where we need to go now."

Maileena looked hesitant. She was still a bit shaken by the recent attempt on her life by a member of Men of Midas and Demilan knew how crazy going to Blackburn sounded like, but he felt confident about that plan. "Blackburn won't hurt me. He wouldn't kill an ex-soldier of his. Trust me, I know him."

"Alright," Maileena surrendered. "I just wish we had your motorcycle so we could get there quickly and safely." With Demilan's current shape, he wasn't fit to drive the motorcycle. Thus, the two were forced to leave it by the apartment building when they left it in a hurry.

"Don't worry. We'll be alright." His voice sounded calm. "Anyway, the bus to Exumber will be here soon."

Maileena looked away in silence. She was clearly disturbed by something. Her eyes said it like an open book. "You're worried about Vera, aren't you?" Demilan knew her well enough by now to guess it.

"Do you...?" she held back the question at first, but then she went ahead with it, her voice dipped in fear. "Do you think they're still alive, Vera and Telia?"

A wave of uncertainty washed over Demilan. *What do I say? I'm not sure myself, but... I don't want her to worry... I also don't want to lie to her...* "Fuck, what am I saying?" she said, saving him from the question. "They have to be alive," She said, full of confidence.

"Of course," Demilan agreed with her, despite being more hopeful than sure of the matter. He held his dream catcher necklace in his hand. As he clutched it, he imagined that he was clutching Telia's hand and a sense of sorrow came over him. *Wait for me, Telia. Please... just be okay. I'll be with you again shortly.*

Bullet and Blade

"How's your sleep?" Maileena asked him.

"My sleep?"

"Yeah, you know... the nightmares." She looked down at the necklace.

"Oh... it's... it's not good. I still have them." They were just as worse as they were before he ever met Telia. Each night brought a new slew of horrors to hunt Demilan in the realm of dreams. Most of the times, the nightmares repeated themselves, yet on other occasions, they were something he had never experienced before. Those were the ones who dreaded him the most.

"You've been talking a lot in your sleep lately. I've heard you say all kinds of things. Especially..." something stopped her from going on.

"What? Say it."

"Well... I heard you say things like: 'they're on fire! Someone, help them!' and stuff about breaking your orders." Demilan bowed down his head. The necklace dropped from his hand and returned to dangle from his neck. He looked as if he was reliving a traumatic event at that moment. "Are you... having nightmares about the Tearful Rebellion?"

"It's nothing new," He said. "They almost always revolve around it."

"You never actually told me what happened back then. What you saw and did."

"It's not really a pleasant topic." He only ever talked about those things with Telia.

"I know. It's okay if you don't want to talk about it. It was rude of me to—"

"No, it's fine." He looked at her. "Do you really want to know?"

"Yes."

Demilan made a long sigh. He was always ashamed of this weakness of his, being an experienced warrior, with skills and proficiency that defined him as a deadly killer. The memories of that single event haunted him for so long that he almost forgot what he was like before it all happened. Before the

D. Sharon

people of the country rebelled against President Christopher Alford and demanded a better tomorrow in a land that had long been forgotten in the yesterday and had never given a damn about today.

"It was two weeks after the Rebellion started. The Heart was packed with angry mobs and armed soldiers. All the streets and roads were closed off. The Segregated Quarter was surrounded by military special forces that were protecting it, and the rebels were constantly trying to break through to get to the president and his men. They were mad. Some of them had signs calling for Alford's resignation... and some had weapons. The government had zero tolerance for armed rebels. They considered them just as much as a threat as Carl Gardner was when he tried to assassinate President Dwight Hamilton 2 years earlier. The Segregated Quarter was built to prevent such things from ever happening again... and now they felt like their lives were in danger." Demilan clenched his hand and ground his teeth. His forehead shrunk and wrinkled as his eyes narrowed. "We all knew they weren't in any real danger. They just panicked. No one anticipated the magnitude of those uprisings. I mean, there were thousands of people out there on the streets. And that's when Alford decided to send in a special military unit to take care of the armed rebels. I was part of that unit. We were sent to Harlington Square, where the rebels put up a decent fight. Today, that square is rebuilt. It looks as if nothing ever happened there, but back then it was... such a wreck. We lost some good men back there. The rebels placed shooters on high vantage points. They had the tactical advantage on us. That's when we were ordered to start using our grenade launchers. I was appalled. I thought our purpose was to make them surrender at minimal cost, but... it all quickly became so much bloodier than I ever thought it would." He closed his eyes as if he saw the pictures in his mind again. His lips trembled. He could envision it all too well. Even the sounds rang in his ear as if it was taking place right then and there. He remembered hearing the shriek of bullets as they flew inches next to him. He remembered dragging one of his

Bullet and Blade

fellow wounded soldiers to a safe place, under a rain of fire and blood. He remembered all the carnage and death that happened by the end of that battle. "The explosions from the grenades... it was horrible. Body parts were flying all over... people were bleeding on the ground, begging for mercy... and in the end, what few that remained of that force of rebels got themselves cornered behind a truck. 'We surrender!' they called at us. 'Please, stop shooting! We give up!' I heard them. We all heard them. And when the order came to disregard their pleas and kill them anyway I refused to do it." He still remembered the cold, heartless tone in which his commander gave the order. "I called at my fellow squad mates to let them drop their weapons and surrender, but... they said we had our orders. 'Fuck those orders!' I remember saying. But they didn't listen to me. They fired another grenade at them. They didn't even care. I felt as if I was a madman, as I was the only one who didn't see them as worthless meat. Everyone else just... blindly obeyed. Those few rebels didn't die like the rest that did before. The explosion wasn't close enough to kill them, but it was just close enough to catch them on fire. They screamed and ran like maniacs as they were burned alive. My squad just stood and watched. And so did I. I wished I could save them, but I couldn't." He could hear their screams in his head again. It felt so vivid that he almost called out for someone to save them. He remembered their flesh blackening and filling up with blisters. When they finally stopped screaming the silence that followed was revealed to be just as scarring and frightening. "There were so many things that I saw back then. They never let go of me. When Blackburn announced that he was resigning as a military General and called for others to do the same, I followed him without a second thought."

"Fuck..." Maileena summarized her reaction. Her mouth remained open for a minute later before she could digest all the grisly details. "My grandma always told me that I was lucky to be young enough to never have known about what happened during those riots, and I've heard stories, but..."

"I try to avoid looking back at it. Those weeks were the

longest ones in my life."

"No one should go through what you did." She touched his shoulder, looking deep into his eyes with every inch of empathy in her body.

"I can say the same thing about you," he said.

"I didn't go through war."

"But you did go through hell." Their eyes met, and hers glittered. While Demilan could only guess what it was like to work at the Godly Succubi, he was perhaps the only person who could get close enough to understanding what it was to bear scars like hers.

"Yeah, I guess you're right," she nodded her head. "And I was one of the few who were dumb enough to step into that hell willingly."

"You had good intentions."

"For people like Kleon Hanford, it doesn't matter if you have good intentions or bad ones. We all went through the same shit. Most of the girls in the Godly Succubi, underage or not, came from foreign countries through Herkin Port. Many of them were kidnapped and were forcibly brought there. Others were just homeless or poor." While the words seemed to be coming out of her mouth easily, Demilan knew that it was not the case. "Kleon had living quarters in the VIP section. Bunk beds in small rooms, mostly roach-infested and rarely ever cleaned. Most of the girls in the club stayed in those living rooms, having nowhere else to go. Only a handful few were local and had a home, and I happened to be one of those few. Kleon allowed the few of us to let them go home at the end of the day as if we had finished out shift at their decent, honest job, but he let us know that if we'd try to run away from him, he would hunt them down, so barely no one ever tried... but I tried..." Demilan remembered how he found her in that warehouse, getting raped and beaten by several of Kleon's men. "If you hadn't showed up in that warehouse... I don't know where I would've been."

"Do you regret ever going to that place?"

"Well, now that they've taken Vera, yeah, of course, but..."

Bullet and Blade

at the time when I first started there, I don't think I was that much filled with regret. The money Kleon paid for each of his girls was more than any job I had before, and I was able to finally provide for Vera. He used to promise the girls who were homeless and had to live in his club that once they would reach a certain amount of earnings he'll let them buy their own freedom. I'm not sure that he was sincere. I don't think I ever saw any of the girls do that."

"No one should need to buy their own freedom." the notion made him sick and angry. "No one should have to go through what you did."

"Yeah, well, that what people like us are for. To right the wrongs." She looked up at him.

Demilan chuckled. "Right."

"We are not a rotten apple. We are a good apple on a bad tree."

"We are a good apple on a bad tree," he repeated her words with a hint of a smile on his face.



Edward

Edward shivered as he sat at his desk at the station and held today's issue of *The Heart of the Country*. "The Deserter General Goes Free," the title said, in letters so big and provocative that he almost felt as if they were mocking him. *They claim he was released on a technicality... not only did Dillard orchestrate this entire case, but he also had the nerve to not give the people of this country the reason why their only hope of justice was just taken away from them.* Edward felt furious, and yet the thought that he couldn't do anything about it infuriated him further. His situation was so dire and hopeless that it felt like it would be appropriate to simply take life as a ridiculous joke from now on.

He went on to read the article in full, summarizing its highlights in his head. *"Blackburn was charged with the murder of Serik Sanders, a member of the Justicars... the Chief of Police, Jonah Dillard, had expressed his sincere regrets that the sentence turned out the way it did. However, he refused to give away any information about what actually happened to result in the exoneration, as well as make any further comments on the case..."* the page crumpled under Edward's tight grip. *"...However, Blackburn did not waste any time making his own kind of comment on the case. The day after the exoneration, the bodies of Nigel Hicken, Tom Broker and Vernes Price, the judge, state attorney and lead investigator, respectively, who worked on the case, were thrown on*

Bullet and Blade

the curve, right outside the APD station in Morth City, Fallhalt..." Edward has yet recovered from the sight. He didn't even like Vernes, and he didn't know the other two, but their fate was truly undeserved. None of them even chose to take part in this case. They were all assigned to it without even asking. Dillard gave Vernes this case against his will, and the judge and state attorney were appointed by the state. *Charles Blackburn truly is a merciless bastard.*

Just when he thought he was done being shocked and horrified, when he thought that it was finally his time to catch a break from all the endless chaos that he knew in Morth City, he read the next segment of the article and learned that he was wrong, for there could be none of that in Alataria.

"...with the death of Officer Vernes Price, who led the investigation case of the serial killer known as the Tri-Surgeon up until his death, Officer Edward Elwin, who was also appointed to the case, was forced to lead it in his stead..." Edward received the notice that he was assigned as the lead investigator in the Tri-Surgeon case shortly after Vernes's death. As far as Edward understood, Dillard was the one who gave that order. At first, Edward was slightly baffled as to why that was mentioned in an article about Blackburn, but only when he read further did he realize that the purpose was to introduce Edward into the article. *"...Officer Elwin also led great efforts in the Blackburn case, as he took over for Officer Price as the lead investigator during the trial period. APD thanked Officer Elwin for his commitment on the case and has acknowledged his hard work to try to put Blackburn behind bars."*

Edward continued to stare at the words for a while longer, trying to wrap his mind around the meaning behind them. Confusion and a sense of surrealism took over him. All surrounding noise was dimmed, and only the sound of his thoughts was clear. *This... this is all a lie. No one ever thanked or acknowledged me. Why would they write this? Who told them to write this?* Edward read the words again and again. *The way it's written... "His commitment on the case... his hard work to try to put Blackburn behind bars." It's almost as if someone wanted to turn me into a hero... at that point, he figured it out. Or a target.* His heart

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