

Alchemy of Hearts chapter 8

Chapter 8: Worries

Ito Hana glanced worriedly at the entrance while pacing from one corner to the other as her heart pounded heavily in her chest.

She was almost about to bite her thumb off in the process.

Soon, she caught sight of Ane and pulled her hand down immediately, managing to compose herself briefly.

“Did you find her?” Ito Hana inquired as soon as her maidservant stepped into the house.

Seeing her mistress in distress broke her heart, especially now she had to give an answer.

Ane shook her head, her brows pulling up together as the corner of her lips stretched.

For a second there, Ito Hana felt her heart clench at her maid’s silent answer. However, she knew she could not give up just like that.

“How could you not find her after over an hour of searching? Where did she run off to? Did anyone see her?” She bombarded Ane with questions, barely allowing her time to answer.

Her brows furrowed as she gazed expectantly upon Ane’s face, hoping for a different response.

Initially, she had thought Haruka would be found and brought back like most of the time but to her surprise, after making a full course meal, her daughter was still nowhere to be found.

Ane bowed deeply and spoke apologetically with her hands placed on her lower belly, “Milady, I asked some merchants at the mini market and they reported that they saw the young lady with a sword.”

“What?!” Ito Hana exclaimed. It felt like a big bomb was left to explode in her ears.

She was still shocked by the revelation when she heard the galloping approaching sounds of two horses and immediately moved her gaze past Ane’s shoulder.

Seeing an older man and a younger man on the horses, her heart raced and she quickly turned to her maidservant.

“Quick. Set the table and ask the two manservants to follow you to the small fields around, and anywhere you could possibly think of.” She instructed.

Ane nodded and hurried off into the house first, leaving her to welcome her husband and son home.

As soon as the horses came to a halt, Mr. Ito and his son, Kenji dismounted and let the two manservants that came with them on foot, take their horses by the reins and lead them away.

Mr. Ito and Kenji paused in their steps at the entrance to take off their footwear.

At this point, Ito Hana smoothened the lines on her forehead, fixed her messy hair in the shortest time, and stepped forward with a welcoming smile plastered on her face.

“My Lord, you are home...”

Mr. Ito returned her greeting with the corners of his lips tugging to the sides. “Hana, I have told you several times not to wait upon us.”

Kenji used the little opportunity before his mother could reply, to greet her with a respectful bow and stepped inside, leaving his parents to do their usual doting.

Ito Hana responded before shifting her gaze back to her husband. “I can’t help it. My Lord, please come in to wash your face and your hands, while I serve dinner.”

Knowing his wife, he shook his head helplessly before leading the way inside.

There was no need chiding her endearingly when she would still go on to do what was in her heart.

When Kenji stepped inside his dim room, he walked straight toward his futon with a sheathed katana in his hand.

On getting close, he discovered that the one he had left beside his futon in the morning had disappeared. The corner of his lips pulled downwards and the calm his face once wore, disappeared.

Without a second thought, he placed the katana next to the futon and left his room.

Walking along a short corridor, he got to the second room by his right and stopped in front of it.

He wasted no time in raising his left fist and proceeded to knock thrice on the translucent sliding door while calling out to his sister, “Ruka. Ruka,” but there was no response.

'Is she not in?' He thought doubtfully and raised his fist in the air about to knock one more time when he heard his mother's voice at the other end of the corridor.

"Kenji."

A tired sigh escaped from her lips as she took steps forward.

Turning to his side, Kenji explained in a low tone before his mother could ask what he was doing in front of his sister's room, "Mama, my sword is missing."

Ito Hana nodded in understanding. "I know. Your sister took it and left the house and she is yet to return."

Kenji looked even more worried and suggested searching for her first, but she refused.

"I don't want your father to be worked up if you leave now. I have already sent Ane and the two manservants to search for her. Wash your face and hands and come out for dinner," Hana explained before turning her back to him.

She did not leave him with much of a choice.

He knew better than anyone how restless their father got when it came to Haruka. She was his only daughter and last born, protecting her was their responsibility.

He would be indeed worked up but he had every right to be. However, thinking from his mother's perspective, who knows, there might not be a reason to be disturbed.

Left with no other option, he followed after her with one disturbing thought in his mind.

'The sky is starting to darken, where did she run off to go and play with the sword? Haruka, please be safe.'

At the same time, outside Naoki's castle...

Daisuke was relieved to see that his spell around the castle was still untouched and immediately jumped off his horse, pulling it by the reins to walk past the picket wood fencing.

So many thoughts had gone through his mind on his way to his master's house.

He thought about the kind of supernatural being that must have seen past his illusion and trespassed into the castle, but now looking over the building and seeing that his magic was still in place, he sighed in relief.

But not wanting to take chances, he decided to go in to check on his master.

After tying his horse to a tree, he walked towards the entrance and climbed the two steps in front of him.

Pushing the door open, his gaze directly landed on the floor to see an unfamiliar footwear, causing his eyes to nearly pop out of their sockets.

'Someone walked in after all.'

Daisuke was frantic with worry as he stood in front of the first sliding door and shoved it open.

He was known to be lucid in dire situations, but he completely lost it after seeing the footwear at the entrance.

He was blinded by worry and forgot to be cautious in his steps.

Many questions flashed through his mind at that point.

'How is it possible for someone to see past my spell?'

'Who is this person?'

'What did he come for?'

Casting a glance at the empty room, he slid it shut and continued unto the next.

Meanwhile, in the tatami room, Naoki heard the sounds of a horse galloping nearby and glanced at the shut sliding window.

His breathing stilled, as did all of his thoughts and his sense calmed down.

He paused to listen carefully for any sound from the human that might give his identity away, and finally, he did pick on something when he heard the erratic steps inside the house.

The loud noise was impossible to escape Naoki's ears.

'Daisuke.' He fathomed as his gaze moved back to the unconscious woman in his arms.

Going over to the next sliding door, Daisuke was surprised to find it open and instantly, his steps slowed as he reached for the sheathed katana tied to his waist.

Prior he lost himself but sensing so much going on, he managed to calm down lest his enemy got the best of him.

If this person could break in without disrupting his illusion, then it simply meant, the person wasn't to be messed with and taken lightly.

Going on tip toes and with his gaze narrowed, he turned to face the room properly only to be met with a shocking scene.

He stopped in his tracks, his body stiffened as his eyes narrowed on the person he saw.

There was no way, but... A foreboding knowing washed over him when he saw the back of a familiar figure facing him.

His heart thudded loudly and with heavy beats, making his chest tighten in response. His breathing was ragged but came in shallow and heavy.

Everything and anything did not make sense anymore. It felt like he stood before an abyss, one he would readily welcome.

'He...' He found it hard to process his thoughts when something else caught his eyes.

In the arms of the familiar figure laid... a woman? As much as he had some questions about her, that was not his concern for now.

He could feel the familiar aura of his master as his fingers trembled. His already fast beating heart increased a notch, making it hard to breathe.

Skeptical of his speculation, he called out hesitantly, "M-Master?"

His gaze continued resting on the man as he, waited, hoped, and silently prayed.

At that title mention, Naoki tilted his head to the side with a calm gaze.

Without warning, the katana slid off his hand and clamped loudly on the floor and the next second, his feet gave way, causing him to drop to his knees.

Wasting no time, he placed his palms against the floor on his sides and pressed his forehead to the ground.

With quivering lips, he greeted, "Master, welcome back."

Speaking from the depth of his heart, his deepest emotions threatened to be divulged.

However, it mattered not. For this was his master. One whom his return had been long awaited.