

The Merman, My Man by Black Velvet

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'Where am I?'

I opened my heavy eyelids as I woke from my dream to see a wooden ceiling with many cracks.

Muddleheaded, I stared at it for a while before my mind slowly cleared up, and I realized that I was in my own cabin on the Seeker. There was no question that Dicken brought me here, too.

F*ck!

Promptly sitting up in agitation, I hastily ran a hand through my messy hair and leaped off the bed.

However, just as I was about to head outside, I noticed the items I always used to disguise myself, and suddenly had a plan.

I needed to find Dicken and catch up to him. But, I couldn't risk exposing myself to the German company, not when Gary was with them. I must have a proper disguise and be as discreet as possible.

With that in mind, I picked up a pair of scissors and walked up to the mirror, cutting my already-short hair even shorter. Fortunately, it was now black after I reverted to human form. I tanned my pale skin as much as possible, putting on a fake beard and aviator glasses after I had done so. My reflection in the mirror now appeared to be a middle-aged man, and I almost couldn't recognize myself.

After also putting on fake tan over the skin behind my ears and neck, I picked up my gun, binoculars, and other equipment. I stuffed them in a plastic bag since I might go underwater later, and I needed them functional. With everything prepared, I put on my old jacket and stepped out.

The entire ship was quiet, and no one was around even after I walked a lap around it. All I heard was static from a walkie-talkie lying on a desk in the captain's cabin. Picking it up, I pressed a button and spoke into it a few times, and soon received responses from Luna and my fellow crew.

They soon informed me that David was still continuing his deal with the mafia and the German company, and he was now the middleman who would travel to Japan with the rest of them.

Luna and the others sounded excited. They were all convinced that they would get rich from this deal. On the other hand, I became increasingly restless like a raft rocking in a thunderstorm.

Why would Gary and the others go to Japan? Were they heading to Hiroshima as well? Perhaps they had realized that the remains of the atomic bomb were necessary to open the portal?

However, I assured myself that this was good. Dicken stood a better chance to reclaim the crystals since the sea was his turf, and it would be an easier task than in a human-controlled city.

That being said, where was Dicken now?

I disembarked from the Seeker and rode a gondola to the casino that David went to last time. However, I hadn't gone that far when I saw another ship approaching the Seeker and docking to it, and a group of people soon boarded it... Oh, wait, they're my fellow crew members.

A few other crew members were on the other ship's deck, and I spotted a familiar figure wearing an army green coat the instant I turned towards him. I promptly dropped to a crouch by reflex, hiding beneath the tent of the gondola. I waited for a chance before leaping ashore, pasting myself against the wall to closely observe what was happening there. It was Gary! Was Laura there too?

I quickly scanned the other parts of the ship, but didn't spot a hint of that vile woman at all. I breathed a sigh of relief, even as I earnestly prayed that she had died at sea.

After all, Gary would never be as troublesome as Laura, despite posing a significant threat. While I did not see her, I soon noticed another annoying person Bob.

He was standing at the second-floor deck, speaking with David and Miya, the mafia godmother. I was excited when I saw the latter and promptly looked around for Dicken, albeit to no avail.

I vaguely sensed that Dicken was nearby because I could feel his presence and massive magnetic field. It thrilled me to think that maybe he had hidden on Gary's boat, which fits his objective.

My lips curled into a smile as I muttered to myself, "Trying to play hide-and-seek with me, dear leader?"

In addition, I felt lucky that David had somehow stumbled his way into this operation, bringing me to Dicken without needing much effort. Perhaps not even Dicken himself would have expected that.

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I watched as Gary returned to his cabin, and found an opportunity to return on board the Seeker. Hiding inside my own cabin to observe the other ship discreetly, I saw Bob speaking to Miya while holding a map. I had a hunch that he was talking about the specific location where the remains of the atomic bomb were. Several black-clad bodyguards were standing behind him and carrying black briefcases that probably contained cash, but the crystals obviously weren't around, nor were there any suitable containers. So, where could they be?

I studied the situation closely, skipping past the bodyguards behind Bob when I suddenly felt my heart clench. I turned back to the bodyguards, focusing unwittingly on a towering brown-haired man wearing shades.

There was nothing that connected him to Dicken in appearance aside from his rather pale skin, and he looked like a stranger otherwise. Even so, I was unable to shift my eyes away from him.

But, I could swear that I didn't have eyes for any other man!

If Dicken could alter his physical structure by consuming human marrow, could he change his appearance using another method as well? Was it possible that he killed someone and took their appearance after killing them?

A bold hunch occurred to me then, and it made sense if it was Dicken. I had to find him and confirm it, or I would get frustrated and blow up because I couldn't be sure if I was mistaken.

I had to find a way to get a ship, but doing it during daylight was impossible. I didn't want Gary and Bob seeing me, so I'd have to wait until nighttime. I would need to dive into the sea and wait for the perfect chance to board that ship.

Holding up my binoculars to study what was going on that ship, I began to plan my operation for the night. I saw several people entering a cabin from the deck, and it seemed that there was some sort of banquet. The unusual man I saw was following them as well, and soon disappeared in the crowd.

As it slowly got dark, the Seeker and the other ship slowly unberthed and left the harbor.

As night arrived, Luna and several other crew members invited me to poker, which I accepted. We played until midnight before I excused myself. After ensuring that no one was watching, I jumped into the sea, swimming like a fish to the other ship nearby under the darkness.

The ship was moving quickly, leaving two streaks of foaming waves in its wake. It would have been impossible for a normal human to catch up to it, but it wasn't difficult with my mutated body.

After a few tries, I found a spot in the hull. Steadying myself by stabbing my dagger into it, I grabbed a rope dangling from the ship and slowly climbed up, carefully looking around when I reached the deck. I

saw that most of the people onboard were enjoying themselves at the banquet. A band was playing, and beautiful blondes were dancing provocatively on stage, their snow-white feet drawing cheers from the crew members. None of them noticed the dark figure that was me, climbing up from the hull.

I promptly vaulted over the scaffolding that led to the deck and quietly walked up beside the cabin. I leaned close to the window to observe the situation inside carefully.

It was hard to get used to it immediately with the swirling smoke and flashing lights, and I saw Gary first before I could find Dicken. He was sharing a table with David, and they were gambling. He had a cigarette between his lips and a stack of chips by his hand, looking just like an indulgent gambler.

It made me wonder... What rank was he now? He appeared to have let loose considerably after being freed from Laura's control.

I held back my disgust towards him and slowly moved to another corner. My hunch was that Dicken would be on the upper floor if he wasn't on the deck, so I climbed up the stairs to the pitch-blackness of the second floor. Every cabin door was shut, and I couldn't see any light at all. There were guards stationed only at the bow and the aft, although there was no telling if they might patrol around the boat.

I sensed Dicken on the third floor then, almost directly above me.

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I fumbled through the darkness, clutching the scaffolding as I climbed up to the third floor. I almost slipped due to nervousness, but fortunately, I managed not to cause any commotion. As I poked my head up for a look, a black figure appeared within sight—it was the suspicious man I saw during the day!

He stood still as he watched the sea thoughtfully, not sensing me when I appeared behind him. His appearance was different from Dicken's human form. He didn't have black hair and was much skinnier. Despite that, I was drawn to the scent that the sea breeze blew towards me—it was a scent unique to Dicken, and it pulled me closer to him.

"It's me, Dicken."

I walked carefully behind him, and he seemed to flinch from my voice. I could guess that he hadn't expected me to find him so quickly. Still, I reached out with my hands to hug him from behind before he could turn around, burying myself into his back as I inhaled his scent... Oh, what an enchanting scent it was to me!

"Don't you try to leave me behind."

An icy hand brushed against the hands with which I embraced him, his fingers slowly stroking my skin before he turned around. I looked up to see a pale blue radiance flashing in his eyes despite his black shades, and I promptly leaned forward. Though I expected a passionate hug and kiss, I noticed that there was cool metal pressing against my head.

Before I could react, he promptly grabbed my hands, held them behind me with a vice-grip, and shoved me towards the second floor. He spoke German with that familiar voice of his, and I understood none of the words. But, his voice instantly drew every armed guard nearby, and they all pointed their black gun barrels at me.

What on earth just happened? My head was blank through it, and I could not understand the present situation. All I could do was stand there, stunned.

"What is it?" Another voice spoke from the deck below, and I looked down to see Gary on the first floor, looking up at me, the suspicious character who had been captured alive.

Then, I was shoved forward to the deck below. I did my best to keep my head down while Gary made his way towards me, so that I wouldn't be recognized. At the same time, I resisted the urge to question the man who was restraining me. I knew that this was Dicken, as his eyes alone convinced me that I absolutely did not mistake him for someone else!

I didn't know why Dicken did that. He was basically a different person, and the sweet sentiment he showed me just yesterday was seemingly nonexistent now. Even if I threw a wrench in his plans, Dicken shouldn't be restraining me and handing me to Gary! Was he crazy? It was utterly incomprehensible!

My mind was a mess, and I was even more frustrated

as I watched Gary slowly make his way towards me. My nerves numbed with every clap of his leather shoes knocking against the deck.

"Who are you? Why were you sneaking around the upper deck?" Gary asked then, standing a meter away from me.

"I... Ladies' room..." I kept my voice raspy while I spoke in English. I could only hope that he didn't recognize my voice. God help me!

"Look up, show me your face."

Damn it. I inhaled sharply as a foreboding sensation crept into my mind, when the vice-grip behind my back tightened. Was that a signal from Dicken? What was that supposed to mean? Still, I could no longer keep my head down now. There was nothing I could do, so I slowly looked up while feeling my cheek muscles twitch in nervousness and fear. But, that gave me an idea, and I promptly pretended to be drunk. I shook my head and forced a smile as I said, "Hey, why so serious? I just need the loo..."

Gary leveled a sharp glare at my shades as if trying to see my eyes behind them. Somehow, the disguise I had been so confident about was suddenly risky, and I could only hope that the darkness and dim radiance stopped him from identifying me. Luckily, my disguise and feigned stupor seemed to pass the test. Gary appeared wary but did not seem to recognize me. He demanded as if he was questioning a burglar, "I've never seen you before. Are you David's crew or Miya's?"

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"Huh? What did you say?" I shook my head again to keep playing drunk before dropping my head, "Oh my god... I think I'm going to wet myself. Mind if I do it right here?"

"Does anyone know who this is?" Gary barked impatiently.

I watched as everyone on deck gathered around me, forcing me to brace myself to keep playing the role of a drunkard as I wobbled all over Dicken. I suddenly felt terribly unlucky. I ought to have a male lead

since I was basically acting, yet my male lead was not cooperating at all.

'Oh, woe is me.'

Meanwhile, the people gathered around me didn't recognize me at all. My disguise obviously fooled David as well, as he did not manage to identify me.

"Throw him in the brig," Gary ordered.

His men kept me restrained before dumping me in the pitch-black room as if I was actually a drunkard. They kept my hands cuffed and poured me a cup of disgusting liquid to sober myself up before leaving me alone for a while.

But I know that this was just the start. These people would never be careless enough to let free a

drunkard playing dumb. Someone would soon come to interrogate me. How should I disguise myself then, especially with Gary? And why on earth would Dicken do this to me?

Even as I was left unsure what to do, the door opened, and I looked up warily. The first person I saw left me feeling as if my death was coining, although I was stunned when I saw the person behind him. Naturally, the first person was Gary, and the one behind was Dicken in disguise. As a matter of fact, Dicken looked like a dutiful goon or henchman. He remained impassive as he carried a plate full of metallic objects for torture, including pincers, scissors, scalpels, and needles. I felt my hair standing on end as I realized what they were for. I really didn't want any of those things inserted into me... Honestly, I had dug my own grave!

I could only shoot looks of distress towards Dicken's unfamiliar face. However, his eyes were hidden behind his shades, and I couldn't see if he was looking at me. He somehow behaved like a robot being controlled, and I panicked as a terrible sense of unease filled my chest in that instant. Perhaps he really wasn't Dicken? But, there was no mistaking it

—that was his scent! Was he controlled by some drug or power? But, he was so intelligent and powerful. How could someone else control him?

I was getting even more confused as my breathing came out quicker. Then, Gary slowly bent forward, throwing a shadow that blocked all light from above me.

He spoke with breath stinking of alcohol and tobacco, "Are you sober now, kid?"

His voice was crude and cruel as he firmly seized my hair, forcing me to lift my head to ease the strain. He grabbed my neck with his other hand when I did so, slamming my back against the wall. I was left coughing and struggling when my face suddenly felt lighter—my shades had dropped off, and it was too late even as I tried to turn away.

Gary's hand on my neck trembled for a moment before easing its grip. He then touched my cheek, forcing me to face him directly, and I could only comply.

“You’re... Linda...” I watched as Gary’s pupils dilated in shock. Disbelief was written all over his face, and his cheeks twitched in excitement, even as he breathed alcoholic fumes over my face.

“God, why are you here... I thought you...”

Then, he laughed and murmured, “Because you missed me? Linda...”

“Disgusting!” I resisted the urge to barf and struggled to escape his hand, but he grabbed me by the collar and pulled, tearing my shirt wide open and baring everything before him. I could feel his gaze blazing right then, darting between my naked skin and leaving me in utter terror. My only choice was to turn towards Dicken, but Gary had utterly blocked my line of vision, while Dicken did nothing at all. ‘What’s with you, Dicken? Are you just going to watch as he defiles me?’

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“What’s in your mind, my darling student? I don’t believe it... Am I dreaming? You’re in my hands once more... Oh, Linda... My dear Linda...”

Gary looked down at me, pressing his cheek against mine, looking at me like a man who was obsessed.

Even in this situation, all I could think about was Dicken. I was no different from a poor lemming on the edge of a cliff.

Suddenly, I heard some noises as killing intent surged out in my direction. Before Gary could turn to look, a pair of pale hands seized him by the back of his head, the fingers almost poking into his eyes.

The veins of the hands flashed with a dangerous blue light as if conducting electricity, making the pale skin appear even more translucent. There was indeed the buzzing of electric currents, passing from Dicken’s hand, which was in contact with Gary’s body.

I watched in shock as Gary wildly spasmed as if electrified, and he soon turned limp. Dicken held him up from the back, turning Gary towards himself as he leveled that unfamiliar face of his at a dazed Gary. He then growled in the familiar voice I knew, “Where are the blue crystals you gathered from the ocean’s depths? Tell me their specific location.”

"It's on a helicopter heading towards Hiroshima. It will reach the port in three days."

Gary's eyes could not focus at all as he looked blankly at Dicken, his body still twitching. He clearly had no idea what he was saying, and merely told Dicken what he wanted to know as ordered.

I understood why Dicken did everything he did then, but the truth was no relief at all. I could feel frustration and misery filling my chest, and my throat felt as if it had been burned by pepper powder with a fiery sting.

"Is this your perfect plan, Dicken?"

I resisted the burning pain, staring coldly at the unfamiliar face, and gave him an ironic smile. "You used me as bait so that you could control him from behind? What a perfect plan."

"Linda, he's trained and highly resistant. I can only control him when he lets his guard down. I didn't tell you because I was afraid you would let something slip."

Dicken grabbed Gary by the collar, picked him up with relative ease, and threw him against the wall. After that, he found the keys and walked up to uncuff me.

However, the instant my wrist was just freed, I grabbed Dicken by the collar and pulled off his shades to look into his eyes. I wanted to know the heart hidden inside his body, and I needed confirmation.

He lowered his eyes then, hiding the emotions churning within. "I would never have let him touch you, Linda."

He seized my wrist, kissed me like he always did, and slurped his tongue over the marks left by the cuffs. Yet, his actions left me indescribably resistant. Like an erupting fuse, it had ignited the emotions that had been welling in me after returning with Dicken.

I promptly slapped his hand away and snapped, "Tell me the truth, Dicken. Did you knock me out so that I was left alone and couldn't risk myself, or was it in your calculations all along to have me come to you after I woke up? That way, you could control Gray and get the information you wanted."

Having said my piece, I inhaled sharply and backed away a little, leaning on the wall as I waited for his answer.

God knows how much I wish it were not the letter. I had been endlessly used all my life as if I was born in some deep conspiracy, and I had enough of all sorts of schemes. I had been betrayed endlessly, first by my teacher, and then by my friend...It was to the point that lies had become habitual.

There were times when I recalled those whom I trusted, and I felt that they were all dancers in a masquerade ball. I couldn't tell the truth from the lies, and I felt

they were all scheming behind my back even as they waved candies in my face and offered me charming words.

Right now, I didn't even want to make new friends or offer any sentiment. I was going to keep my distance from everyone, even my mates on the seeker.

Even so, Dicken had utterly enraptured me. It did not matter if I no longer completely trusted everyone else. He was my last harbor. But, said harbor was now vague and uncertain—barely standing against the wind. If Dicken used me...

Immense unease enveloped me. It was like a cliff right before me, and I would be left in pieces if I took a single step forward.