

Alchemy of Hearts chapter 6

Chapter 6: Trouble

"I-I'm sorry, please... forgive me!" Haruka stammered a few words of apology immediately, lowering her head in the process.

Although she seemed to have been annoyed for being called a witch, she knew it was not her place to retort.

Not when the consequences of her actions were recounted endlessly in her mind. She was going to be in big soup if her parents found out.

Ignoring her pride and defense, she had to plea, hoping they would let bygones be bygones.

Sadly, the first man that bumped into her felt his hazy vision clear from the impact as he found his footing and glanced at her.

A lecherous grin slowly spread across his fat face, admiring the peerless beauty before him.

"She looks so pretty even in that attire." He noted while exchanging glances with his friends before moving his sight to Haruka who had raised her head with a stunning gaze directed at him.

"Pretty lady, escort us to have more cups of sake, and we will teach you how to play in return," he said with his index finger pointed at the sheathed sword in her hand.

Haruka lowered her gaze to the sword briefly before her attention was drawn by the three men laughing hard at her, forcing her brows into a slight frown.

They were obviously making fun of her as they didn't look like good men. Moreover, they were all clearly drunk.

She blamed herself for even standing there to listen to their drunken words in the first place, but her face didn't reveal any signs of irritation.

"Thank you for your kind gesture, but I have to take my leave now. My father awaits me to bring this sword to him," she said with a small bow and turned to leave, causing their laughter to die down.

The first man exchanged a knowing glance with his friends as a cunning smile simultaneously spread across their faces.

"Young lady, you can't leave yet."

Haruka paused in her steps. 'What are they getting at? Am I in trouble?' Her nervous voice resounded in her head as she slowly turned around.

"Misters, why can't I leave yet, I don't have any business with you?"

The third man grinned, "Oooh young lady, we have a lot of businesses together." Before Haruka could register his words, she saw the men stepping toward her with a lecherous smile.

Guessing their ugly plan, she unsheathed her sword out of impulse and immediately pointed it at the first man.

"Don't come close!" She warned.

At first, the men paused in their steps, frightened by the well-polished katana pointed at them, but things took a different turn when they observed the fingers clasping the handle tremble slightly.

They became fully aware that she was not confident and chuckled loudly.

"She wants to fight us," the third man voiced in-between laughter.

'What's funny?' Haruka narrowed her eyes with her lips pressed together. Her fear turned into irritation in the same second.

Eventually, the first man stopped laughing. "Young lady, stop playing around and put the sword away."

Haruka refused to listen and swung her sword from one side to another to scare them, but they remained on the same spot, confident that she wouldn't dare to slash them with it.

"Look at her, she doesn't even know how to hold the katana properly. What are you waiting for, grab her arms!" The first man commanded.

The second man and the third man immediately stepped forward with a taunting smile.

"Young girl, we will teach you how to wield a sword, be obedient." The third man said, ready to grab her left arm with his outstretched hands.

Haruka noticed his movement on her right side and immediately swung her sword without thinking.

Time seemed to stop until a shriek escaped from the third man as he covered his wounded arm with his right palm. "Arrgh!"

Because of the depth of the cut, a red warm thick liquid seeped from his left arm unto his fingers, staining his kimono in the process.

The other men stayed rooted on the same spot as their eyes widened in shock with their mouths agape.

Haruka stood there frozen in the alleyway as a chill ran down her spine.

Overtaken by a mixture of shock and fear, she stammered in a low tone. "D-Did... I-I actually cut his arm?"

The third man cried out in pain as he fell on his butt with his eyes squeezed tightly, and only then did everyone come back to their senses.

His two friends hurried to his side in fright to check him out.

'Oh no! I am in deep trouble!' Haruka concluded in her head, well aware that they would never let her go, not after what she just did.

Using the opportunity of the men distracted by the injury she inflicted on one of them, she immediately spurned and broke out in a mad dash with the bloody sword and the sheath in her hands.

Her quick retreating footsteps alerted the first man who looked away from his injured friend. His face twisted in anger as he immediately shouted an order to the second man.

"Don't let her get away! Make sure to drag her to Lord Date! How dare a woman carry a katana around and even dare to harm us with it?!"

Haruka felt the rush of adrenalin when she heard the orders for her to be caught plus the quick footsteps immediately following solidly behind her and increased her pace.

A few minutes later, Haruka didn't know how long she has been running as she was almost out of breath.

They have already come to the top of a low cliff surrounded by trees, but the man after her was relentless. He was still chasing her and shouting curse words from behind.

Haruka glanced behind her with gritted teeth. Beads of sweat had already appeared on her forehead and neck area.

"W-When will... he stop chasing after me? I'm dead tired." She mumbled breathlessly.

Turning her gaze back to the path before her, she continued running when suddenly she stepped on a slimy bunch of yellow leaves and slipped with a scream escaping from her lungs as she rolled off the cliff.

The unexpected turn of events caught the man on her tail off-guard, as he quickly came to a halt. "D-Did... S-She fall to her death?" At that thought, fear gripped his heart.

Not wanting to be accused of chasing someone to their death, he looked around to see nobody in sight before turning on his heels and running back in the direction he came from.

Haruka's howling scream continued as the fresh grasses around her rustled till she landed at the foot of the cliff.

Somehow, the kind of pain she was expecting to feel didn't come, and her lashes slowly fluttered open.

She was lucky the cliff was not high, still, she felt a mild pain coming from her back. Surely, a bruise has formed there.

Glancing around her surroundings she groaned and tried to sit up. It took a few minutes for her head to boot.

When she glanced at her left hand and realized the sheath was gone, she quickly propped herself up with the katana as a 'hiss' sound escaped from her lips.

Next, she brushed the dirt off her face and clothes, before beginning to search for the sheath around that area.

Some minutes later, the sky began to darken and after failing to find the sheath, she huffed in frustration.

She was going to be in trouble for taking her brother's katana out of the house because losing the sheath will expose her.

Haruka straightened her back and turned around to find a way up the cliff, and that was when her gaze landed on a brightly lit castle some distance away, which made her heart race.

Immediately, she felt a pull towards the building.

Instead of carrying out her initial plans of finding a way up the hill, she allowed her heart to rule her head by taking steps on the path toward the big building.

On her hundredth step, the large castle was now in full view and she paused to admire it.

In one of the large rooms in the castle, the familiar body that belonged to Sato Naoki laid stiffly on the futon with a thick quilt covering the area between his chest and his feet.

Suddenly, the fingers on both hands lying motionlessly on his sides moved for a second and stopped.

After about five seconds had passed, the ten fingers moved again, and this time around the motion was consistent.

“Who lives in this kind of castle?” Haruka wondered as she came to a halt in front of the common picket wood fencing.

She thought she was attracted by the traditional finishings of the castle, not knowing it was something else that pulled her towards it.

Without thinking much, she passed the wood fencing and walked into the vicinity.

At the same time inside one of the rooms in the castle, the eyes of the man lying unconsciously on the futon flew open.

Somewhere in town, Daisuke who had just left the medicine store on his horse felt a stung in his heart and a pounding in his head.

His brows furrowed as he slowed down.

Placing his left palm on his chest with the other one holding onto the horse’s reins, he shut his eyes and found silence in the middle of the bustling street to listen.

In a flash, his eyes opened as his gaze into the distance turned fierce. He had discovered what was wrong. Someone had broken into the illusion he created outside his master’s castle.

‘Someone has broken into Master’s castle!’

Instantly, he moved his left hand back to the horse’s reins and nudged its body with his feet.

“Go!” He shouted and the horse sped up almost immediately.

The sudden loud galloping sounds from the horse put fear in the peddler’s hearts, as everyone immediately moved out of his path.

“How rude of him!” Two merchants grumbled as they watched Daisuke disappear from their sight in a flash.