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The Villain

It pains me. It truly does. To see them: these little inexperienced kids, sent to fight me full of hope, barely trained, by Them, so often. Every kid is the same. They come in, thinking, *knowing*, I'm the enemy, *knowing* all of the ones before them never came back from their fight, hoping they'll survive with the thought of avenging their friends. They're so hopeful, fighting so confidently for their side. The "good" side.

To them, I'm the villain. I want to take down the "good" guys and bring destruction upon their world. It's not true, at least in my story. I've lived through hundreds of stories where I'm portrayed as the villain. It's the same cookie-cutter story, and it pains me that it won't stop.

The kids. The kids are the warriors. They just completed their training, truly knowing nothing, thinking they've mastered it all. They are immediately sent to me. The "good" side won't stop telling them they are the only ones who can defeat me. They come in, attacking me. The curse defends me. I never want to kill them, but they always end up dying.

I remember Rose the most. She was the 139th kid sent here, youngest of all, only eleven. She had completed her training the day before. She arrived determined, her red hair dirty and falling out of place from her ponytail, eyes hardened with hate.

I am Rose Simprevia, she said, holding back her tears. *You killed my sister, Solae. I'm the one who will avenge her.*

I looked at her. It truly pained me to see the sibling of a kid. They wanted their vengeance; they wanted to be the one to make it back. I remember Solae. She was fifteen, put up a good fight, only the month before. Now, they sent Rose, so much younger, barely trained. It wasn't fair.

I put my hands up.

They've all failed, I told her gravely. Her eyes only hardened. She raised her weapon.

And I won't. I'm stronger, she answered.

I shook my head sadly. They couldn't keep sending these kids to me. They just couldn't. It's not fair to these kids.

Rose attacked; she had her weapon out, a bow and arrow. Before she charged, I yelled for her not to, knowing it would only result in her death. But the fire unleashed without my control, and Rose screamed. How could they send kids here with physical weapons? They know it's not a match for the fire's powers.

The fire that engulfed Rose was the same kind that engulfed the others, created by the "good" side. How can people believe a side is so good when they send unprepared kids to a fight they never could've won?

The fire that ended up killing Rose lasted a few seconds. She was on the floor, whimpering, burned in so many places. I knelt down next to her.

Help me, she cried.

I wish I could, I answered.

Why are you so evil, she asked? She did not understand. She didn't understand it wasn't my fault or mine; it was the side she was fighting for, for sending her here.

It wasn't my choice, I told Rose, as I explained. The side she was fighting for, the "good" side, wouldn't stop sending unprepared kids for a suicide mission. I didn't control this curse. I was punished. My parents didn't allow me to go train with the other children when it was my time. Because of their defiance, I was made into the trained children's enemy.

Rose suffered for hours.

Please, save me, she begged.

I can only ease the pain, I told her.

Why can't you escape this, she asked me.

Because they bound me here, I told her. I'm suffering just as much as you.

I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry. I'm sorry for causing you this pain. I'm sorry you are bound here. I promise I'm not mad at you. I understand that you are bound by forces more powerful than us, and I wish I could set you free, she told me. It was the first time a child understood. She was eleven, and she understood that I never wanted to kill her, or the others.

As she breathed her final breaths, I started telling her the same words I told all the others, with the same amount of meaning.

I want you to know you have nothing to be sorry for. It wasn't your fault. It's not your fault they sent you here. You didn't know. It's their fault for sending you here to a battle they knew you'd never win, and I'm sorry that it had to happen this way. Your pain is almost over, just a bit longer, and it's over, I told her, as I told the other sixty-six kids before her, and the 187 kids after her

I'm ready to leave now, she said, as her last breaths left her body. As her heart beat for the last time. As her body went limp.

It just wasn't fair anymore. It wasn't fair that these kids were suffering like this. I wasn't mad at myself for being unable to save them, or the kids for trying to kill me. I was mad at the "good" side. The ones who sent them here to die. And mark my words, they were going to pay.