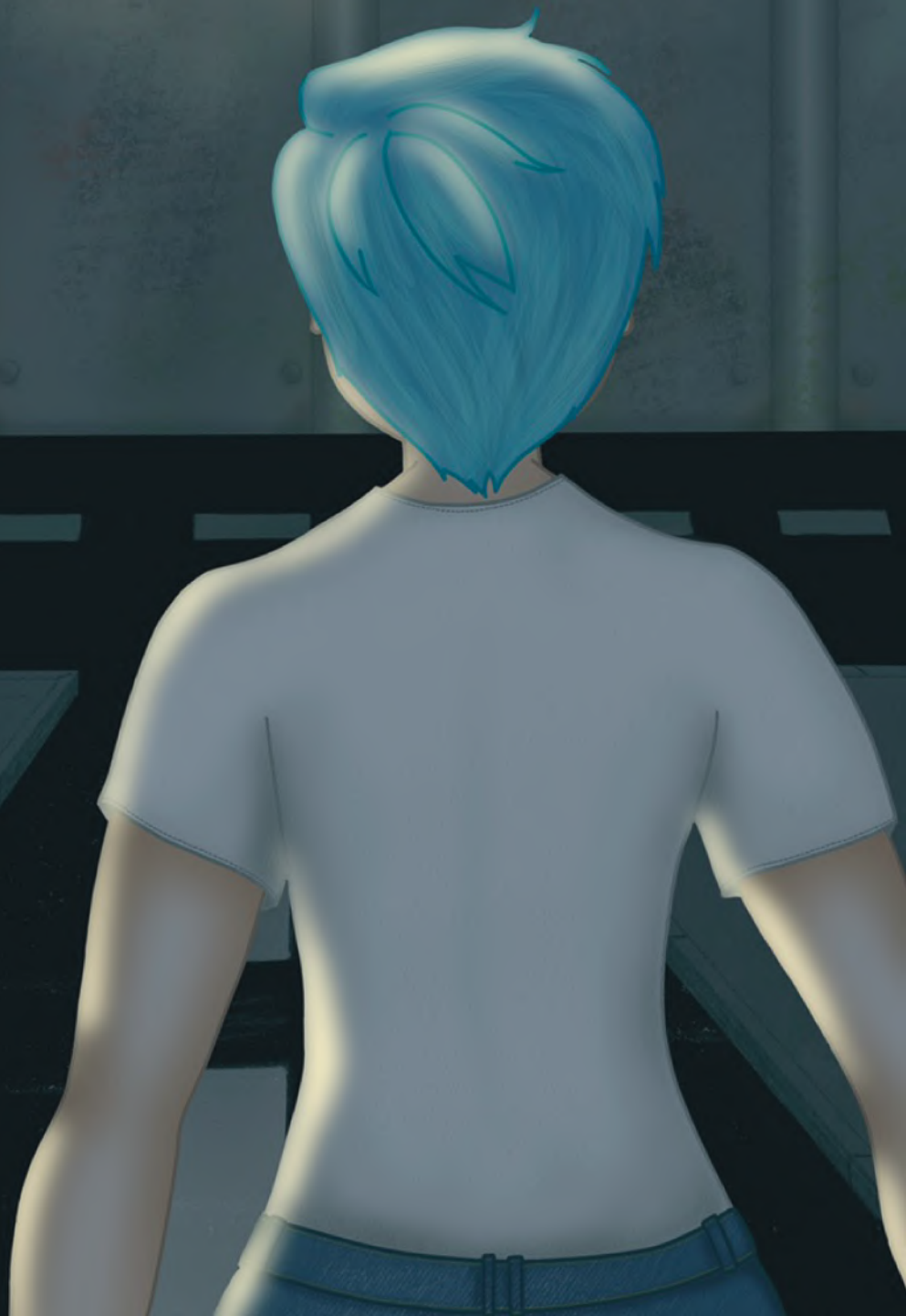


SHIKOBA



**MARINA
LUNSING**

Chapter 6.1

“HighLife CEO Gareth Bullard has bought military drones through a rogue civil servant within the Ministry of Defense. This civil servant is mentioned in government records as a vocal critic of the government on the work floor. Their criticism entails that the government is too soft on Shikoba Bullard’s ‘rebellion’. Shikoba will follow in Lisa’s footsteps if you do not address this rogue behavior to your father, Minister Marc Bennington of Finance. I’ve linked you the data you need to show him. Just present it to him as an anonymous leak you received. After all, that’s accurate. Anyway, I’m counting on you.”

So read Ace’s message on Eric Bennington’s phone. “Damn it, Ace.” He complained with his eyes still half-closed.

“Morning.” Eugene’s voice called from above. Most Ignis Academy students lived in Ignis Village, but the Benningtons did not. After all, when your father was a minister and you lived an upper class life, sharing a room and a bunk bed was but a small price to pay.

“Morning.” Eric responded.

“You got Ace’s message too?” Eugene asked.

“Yeah.”

“What’d you think? Is Gareth Bullard really gonna try and do Shikoba in?”

“I feel like if they want Shikoba dead, there’s easier ways to accomplish that.”

The two turned silent for a second. Lisa's disappearance came as no surprise to the twins, but that didn't mean they weren't shocked. He couldn't speak for Eugene, but yesterday's news that Isinachi had joined the Investigation Club, an obvious successor group to LISA, made him nervous.

LISA was a very underground, but also very ineffective and loose group of people. It was a niche movement that was very easy to ignore as a result. The Investigation Club, on the other hand, was an official school club endorsed and supervised by the prestigious Skye Fall, which legitimized what they did. Officially, it was a detective-playing club that students could come to for things like a lost wallet, but any doubts on the club being a rebel group were quelled when Skye wrote that column in the Ignis Times. He didn't know why it wasn't shut down already, but what he did know was that the only thing the club was doing was begging for someone to make them 'disappear'.

"I'm annoyed that Ace is putting this information in our hands." He said. Lisa had great ideas for the future, but there was no way he was going to die for them.

"Right?!" He heard Eugene sit up in his bed, "I don't want classified files on my damn phone!"

"Quiet. You don't want Dad to hear that, you idiot."

"Yeah, yeah, shush, you little prick."

...

"So," Eric cut to the chase, "do we do what Ace tells us?"

"Listen man," Eugene whined, "I don't necessarily mind helping Ace here and there, but getting Dad involved is a terrible idea."

"I agree."

"Doing nothing seems shitty too, though..." Eugene then said, "I mean, Ace wouldn't sound the alarm for someone's death for no reason, right? They've never done so before."

"Make up your mind."

"No you."

"Can't."

"Me neither, dipshit. It's not exactly simple!"

"Of course it isn't. Let's give ourselves till the end of the week to think it over. We'll do the status quo approach until then."

"Infuriating neutrality, then?" Eugene asked.

"Are you suffering from amnesia?"

"Oi, I'm just making sure we're on the same page here!"

Infuriating neutrality it was indeed. It was their self-aware term for their new approach to political discourse after Lisa vanished. The twins had concluded that rather than siding with Shikoba, it was simply better for them to keep their opinions to themselves, without pretending to be someone they're not. That way, they could refuse to cooperate with, say, the student council, without the risks that came from being associated with the Investigation Club. They weren't rebels, they were simply minding their business.

Eric could hear Lisa scolding him in his head every time he thought about what he had allowed himself to become. It was as if she was still there...

He couldn't deny that he missed her.

Eugene then got down from the top bed and made his way to the bathroom in silence. While his brother was away, Eric opened Ace's message on his phone again. Not responding felt bad. He didn't really know Shikoba personally, but now, if she disappeared, he'd know what happened. That wasn't going to be an easy pill to swallow.

Still, the idea of doing something about it was terrifying.

After Eugene finished showering, it was Eric's turn. Before long, they were eating breakfast together.

Illuminated by a ceiling lamp shining a soft light onto the living room, Eric and his brother were surprised to see their father walk out of his private office and take a seat at the head of the marble dinner table with a plate of his own. He was a well-dressed man, even at home, but never stood out among his colleagues. His short, brown hair was well-maintained, but generic, and his glasses were of high quality, but looked standard. The only two facial expressions he ever showed the cameras and his sons alike were a professional, neutral look and a polite smile.

“Good morning, you two.” He said as he sat down.

“Good morning.” Eugene answered as Eric nodded along, taking a bite of his bread.

“I do apologize for not being among you recently, I have been rather busy.”

“We don’t blame you.” Eugene said, “It’s not like you have an average job as minister.”

“It is rather time consuming, indeed.” He smiled, “But I do enjoy the work I do.”

Silence followed. For a politician, their father didn’t talk much. Not when there was not much to say, anyway. It made him appear cold at times, but Eric still appreciated these moments of silence. He was not one to force conversation.

“Say, Eugene,” Marc said, “what kind of job are you aiming for after your studies? I know what Eric aims to do, but you, however...”

“I haven’t decided.” He shrugged, “But lately I’ve been thinking about becoming something like a financial advisor or something.”

“Ah, a consulting role. Intriguing. How come?”

And so, that moment of silence ended. If the topic was economics and finance, his father and brother could talk for ages. The ways of budgets, markets, and money were infinitely intriguing to the two of them. Eugene wasn’t being honest with the reason he was giving though. Not that Eric was listening to what Eugene was saying, but he didn’t need to in order to know he was lying.

Eugene had no faith in attempts to bring about democracy. In his mind, it was not realistic to hope for regime change, so he aimed to influence government policy in more positive directions however he could. He wanted change within the system, and even within LISA, he was vocal about this.

What about himself? He didn't know what road to walk, but...

Eric was different from Eugene. He was of the belief that the dictatorship could still crumble, and that he might experience true freedom in his lifetime. He shared this sentiment with Lisa, perhaps even more so than Isinachi did. What he didn't believe, however, was that he could make that happen. After all, he was naught but a socially awkward wimp that ran away when presented with consequences for what he believed. If there was ever a violent revolution, he could arm a dozen or so rebels with swords, but that was the extent of his relevance. Lisa wanted him and his brother on her side to draw people's attention as mini-celebrities, but it wasn't like he was someone who caught many eyes.

Lisa gave the two of them hope. Now that she was gone, the had returned to the sidelines.

"At least Dad doesn't have to worry about us like this." He whispered to himself.

"Hm?" Marc looked his way, "Did you say something, Eric?"

"Not really."

Chapter 6.2

The day went on as normal. Eric was in his classroom, learning about various metals and their uses and traits from his textbook, when he heard loud bonking on the window from the hallway. He saw blue hair, and that was all he needed to know what was going on here.

She won Isinachi back, and now it was his turn.

“Somebody is calling for you, Eric.” The teacher, a broad man with a thick, white beard told him.

“And?”

“Mister Bennington, please. Channel some of your father’s manners and hear her out. It could be urgent for all you know.”

And so, there he was, in the hallway, facing Shikoba Bullard. One look into her puppy-like eyes was enough to exhaust him in a second.

“Yo! You’ve seen our new club, right?” She asked him.

“I have. As has anyone else.”

“Isinachi’s joined us, did you hear?”

“It’d be hard not to.”

“So?” She grinned as she made two fists of enthusiasm, “Why not join too?”

“I don’t have interest in any club activities. I want to focus on my studies instead.”

He could bear this conversation if it was a one-time thing, but this was Shikoba Bullard. She was not going to stop bothering him until she got the answer she wanted. The thought of enduring this for weeks on end gave him a headache already.

“Hey now, at least give us a visit to see what it’s like? All they’re teaching us is propaganda, anyway! Why not drop by and catch up with Isinachi?”

“I’m good, thanks. Can I go back to my class now?”

Shikoba’s happy attitude faded away. It was time for the emotional assault.

“Why do you act so cold?!” She stomped her foot, “You were in LISA, weren’t you?! Do you not care about these values anymore?!”

“Shikoba,” Eric sighed, “nothing you can say will convince me to join your club. I’m not the type of person that can risk their life and status to fight for a cause. Ask someone else.”

“I don’t believe that! You-..!”

Shikoba was interrupted as a leather glove grabbed her shoulder.

“That is enough, Shikoba.” Luna told her.

“Why?! His teacher gave him permission! What rule am I breaking?!”

“You’re being truant. You have a class of your own to worry about. Club business is for club hours. The deal is that you and Mach attend your classes peacefully as I surveil you. Unless you would rather go to jail after all?”

“Tch! This is fucked!”

“I don’t make the rules, Shikoba.”

“I get the feeling that’s a good thing!”

“A baseless assumption.”

Their bickering continued ever on, so Eric took his leave and returned to his classroom. For once in his life, he was grateful for the work of an SSA agent.

Despite Shikoba’s best efforts, he was not deterred from his daily routine, and returned to his work in silence until the ear-deafening bell rang. Eric chuckled to himself. It was a sound second in obnoxiousness only to Eugene’s voice.

In silence, he sat down at a lone table in his cafeteria. He did not share the cafeteria with Shikoba and most of her club, or with Eugene. Courses that shared that one included Finance, Economics, Journalism, and plenty of others that somewhat vaguely related to each other. His course, Smithery, did however, share a cafeteria with Culinary Arts, which meant...

“Hey. It’s been a while.” Isinachi walked up to his table. As expected, the Investigation Club was absolutely relentless. Ironically, their style was remarkably similar to the SSA’s.

"Hey."

"Can I sit down?"

"Sure. Don't expect anything, though."

"I won't."

He didn't believe him. But whatever.

"So," Eric began, "why are you guys so adamant that I join your club?"

"Because I know that you believe what I believe. I want you to be free from the governor's mind prison."

"Thank you for your concern, but I am fine."

"I doubt that you are." Isinachi shook his head.

"Forgive me if this is a rash assumption, but you are scared of being punished, aren't you? That's why you're not joining us."

"No, I just completely changed my perspective of the world on the exact second that Lisa vanished."

"You can be just as annoying as Eugene sometimes, you know that?"

"Hey, that's a bit far." He chuckled, and Isinachi did the same. Dammit, since Isinachi knew him much better, he was better at pulling at his heartstrings than Shikoba was.

"I won't bother you too much." Isinachi then said, "Just keep us in the back of your mind, okay? You'll always be welcome, both in the clubroom and at my place."

"Your place being..? They kicked you out of Ignis Village, I assume?"

“Ah, that’s right.” Isinachi smiled. “I live in the attic of the burger café where we held the last LISA meeting.”

“That’s tough.”

“It’s okay. Roxanne is a good roommate, and the owner is a good man.”

Sheesh. Ignis Academy was no joke when it came to dissent. Nothing in Sanctus was, anyway.

“Do your parents still pay for your education?” Eric asked.

“No. But some of the owner’s workers quit, so he was able to hire Roxanne and I both to let us make enough money to keep the Investigation Club going.”

“I guess that’d be the only reason left to pay up, if you’re doomed to written off as a rebel for the rest of your life.” Eric shrugged.

“No need to act cold.” Isinachi smiled knowingly.

Isinachi saw right through him. Of course Eric cared. Hearing his friend’s stories about how he’s being treated like garbage made him angry! But he didn’t want to show it. He couldn’t make a fuss. He had to stay silent. He didn’t want it to happen to him, too. What would the point be? He wasn’t brave or inspiring like them. He couldn’t do anything for the movement even if he wanted to. He respected the living hell out of Isinachi, but...

“Please, Isinachi.” He said, “Stop trying to convince me. My situation isn’t like yours. If what stopped me and you was the same, I would’ve already been a member, welcoming you when you joined. Nothing you can say or do can move me to act.”

He paused to take a deep breath, fighting back some persistent tears.

“It just makes me feel bad.”

He lowered his head. Pathetic. He was so pathetic. Him and Eugene both. But for their safety’s sake, as well as for their father’s sake, who might face repercussions if they joined what was basically a rebel club, they had to remain infuriatingly neutral. It was the best they could manage, and it was sad.

Briefly, he felt a strong hand on his shoulder, before Isinachi walked away. He was a great man. His best friend just died, and it took him only a few weeks to resume his rebellion with renewed conviction.

He didn’t deserve to stand beside him.

And so, his day resumed. With a renewed focus, or rather, a drive to distract himself, he finished his exam project for this semester; a one-handed sword with an oval-shaped guard, which he regrettably was not allowed to take with him as he went home.

He wanted nothing more than to return home ASAP to distract him from the memory of his conversation with Isinachi, but alas, he promised to wait for Eugene at the front gate like always. He was proud of his work today, though, which replenished his mental stamina a bit.

It seemed his day would not return to normal quite yet, however, as a finger lightly tapped his shoulder. Seriously? Who was it this time? Roxanne? Mach?

He was way off.

“Hello, am I bothering you?”

It was Madeline. This wasn't the first time she had come to talk to him, but she hadn't done so for a long time. She stopped ever since he joined LISA, Eric realized. Typically, she'd ask how he was doing, exchange small talk, and then leave right before Eugene arrived. What made her come to him again, he wondered? Either way, seeing her reminded him of Ace's message. If Gareth Bullard was indeed plotting an assassination, to what extent did Madeline...

“Not really.” Eric answered.

“Oh, excellent!” She said. “I had been meaning to converse with you again, but I feared you'd be unwilling to.”

“I can see why. I don't mind, though.”

“You don't? That is pleasant to hear.” She smiled a bit.

“You're welcome.”

She wasn't outright unpleasant to talk to, but she unnerved him. Mostly because he couldn't get a read on her. He never understood why she seemed so interested in him in particular, especially nowadays. After all, he was one of Lisa Jackson's few friends. There was probably nobody other than maybe Shikoba who Madeline hated more.

"I heard somebody in your class finished their exam project in advance. Was that you, by any chance?" Madeline asked, in a tone that made him feel like she assumed as much.

"Yeah, I forged a sword. I can't show it to you though, it has to stay inside the school. Rules are rules."

"Rules are rules, hm?" Madeline looked pleased, "It delights me to hear you in particular say that."

"Because I was with LISA before?" He asked, but his heart raced immediately after doing so. He shouldn't have brought that up! Why risk it?!

"Correct." She grinned softly, "I enjoy conversing with you. When you joined LISA, I feared that you might hate me."

Huh. She seemed genuine when she said that. He guessed there wasn't much to fear on a personal level, then.

“I don’t hate you, never have. I...” he searched for a good way to phrase his words, “don’t always agree with how the systems here work, but I don’t hate anyone over it.”

Other than Governor Morsus, but he was probably better off leaving that out.

“That is genuinely a relief. Thank you.” She smiled.

“No problem.”

“Say I want to ask you something.”

“Sure.”

“You are not a member of any club, correct?”

“That’s right.”

“So then, am I safe to assume that you have no plans this weekend?”

“I guess so.”

“Then, would you perchance be keen on accompanying me for dinner tomorrow?”

Huh? What? Was he being asked out right now? By Madeline Bullard? This was a whole new kind of headache to deal with. Was *this* the nature of her interest in him? That made a negative amount of sense in his head. He guessed accepting would keep him in her good graces, and would balance out the time he is already forced to spend with Shikoba’s stalker army.

Neutrality was his objective, and as much as being the rope in a tug of war match between Shikoba and Madeline was bound to tire him out sooner rather than later, it *was* the epitome of neutrality.

"Sure, that's fine."

"Sincerely? Wonderful!" Her eyes briefly before she recomposed herself. "Oh, um, my apologies, I did not wish to appear so childishly excited."

"There's nothing wrong with showing emotions."

"You raise a fine point!" She let a brief giggle escape, "So, shall I have you picked up tomorrow?"

"That's fine."

Right as they agreed, they saw Eugene in the distance, heading their way.

"Well, I won't occupy you any longer." Madeline placed her right hand's fingertips on her chest and lightly bowed. "We shall meet again tomorrow at, let us say... seven PM, is that fine?"

"Yeah, it is."

"Perfect! With that settled, I shall see you tomorrow!"

And there she went, walking back onto school grounds. As student council president, she probably couldn't leave for as long as club activities were still going on.

"Hey!" Eugene slapped Eric's shoulder, "Were you talking to Madeline just now? It's been a while since she approached you, what'd she want?"

"I'm going on a date with her tomorrow."

...

"What."

Chapter 6.3

A day passed, and while Eugene waited for his takeout delivery, Eric waited for his ride. Both were lounging on their house's soft, white sofa. While Eugene was wearing a hoodie and jogging pants, however, Eric wore a nice, white shirt and a red tie.

"So?" Eugene asked, "you have the hots for Madeline?"

"Not really."

"Leading her on, then? Didn't see you for the type to do so."

"Because I'm not." Eric sighed. "The Investigation Club is constantly approaching me, so I'm using this as an opportunity."

"You too? I've got Mach and Roxanne on my tail at all times. But tell, what opportunity?"

"An opportunity to appear neutral. If I talk often with both sides, people won't think I've chosen one."

"That's surprisingly smart!"

"Nothing surprising about it."

"Take the compliment, you little fuck."

"Yeah, yeah."

Eugene didn't respond further, and got up from his seat. "Dude, there's a limousine approaching our front door. Gotta be your ride." He pointed at the window with his thumb. "Don't piss her off, yeah? If whatever Ace told us is true, I don't wanna know how involved *she* is."

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll be fine.” Eric got up as well.

“Have fun, then.”

“Sure.”

And like that, Eric walked out the door, and was greeted by a black limousine parking with one wheel onto the sidewalk in front of the Benningtons’ house. It seemed that Madeline herself was not inside, but rather, a personal driver had come to pick him up instead.

Ha, Eric thought. Somebody was rich.

A quick drive later, Eric found himself at a gigantic, multi-story convention center called ‘The Green Dragon’. The building’s top floor was home to the most prestigious restaurant in the city, and it definitely looked the part, judging by pictures he had seen before. He wondered if this was just a natural kind of place for Madeline to eat at, or if she chose it specifically for this occasion. Either way, if not for his father’s wealth and the generous allowance that he received as a result, he would’ve gone broke today.

After checking in and hearing from the receptionist that Madeline was already present, Eric took the elevator and arrived at his destination at last.

The restaurant’s floor seemed to be made of a green type of stone that you could see your reflection in, almost like glass. Otherwise, it looked a bit like marble.

Rather than a wall, the far end of the restaurant had glass instead, providing customers with a beautiful view of the city from above.

Near that glass window, he found Madeline's table, and sat down on the empty chair.

"Hey." He greeted her.

"Hello! I am glad you are here."

"Was I late? I had trouble figuring out what floor the restaurant was."

"Your arrival was perfectly punctual, almost by the second." She smiled.

"Really? I did a good job, then."

Madeline was wearing a black, shoulder-less dress, a necklace of white pearls, and earrings to match. And did she get different glasses? They looked newer.

"May I say you look dashing? Or is that a bit too forward?" Madeline asked, fidgeting with her hair a little.

"You can, thank you. And don't worry, there's no way for you to make me feel like you're bold or weird. I've got some out-there acquaintances." He joked dryly, making Madeline giggle.

"Ahaha, quite so! You find yourself surrounded by rather peculiar individuals, I must say."

"They're good people," Eric said, "but they're also exhausting, and reckless, and sometimes stupid. Except my brother. He's always stupid."

“Do you and your brother not get along?” Madeline looked confused, “I was under the impression that you had a strong bond.”

“We do. We just also argue a lot, and he’s always in the wrong when we do. He’d say the same about me, though.”

For a second Madeline turned silent, as if lost in thought for a bit. In their quiet moment, a waiter came by to offer the two of them the menu, and asked if they wanted something to drink. After Madeline ordered a white wine and Eric a cola, their conversation continued.

“It is rather challenging for me to envision a relationship like yours with your brother.” Madeline said.

“How so?”

“I rather abhor arguments, you see.” She looked down, her expression turning somber, “Far too swiftly does my blood boil and my voice of reason get substituted for blind rage. I have acted... regrettably in the face of conflict before. I would struggle to keep a relationship prone to conflict healthy.”

“I see. Have you considered talking to someone about that? Sorry if I’m prying.”

“It is fine. But well, I find myself having nobody in particular to talk to about such matters.”

“Sounds tough.”

“It is rather alright. Let us not worry over me and ruin the mood of our dinner, shall we?” She waved her flat hand left and right, dismissing the topic.

The waiter then came by with their drinks, Eric and Madeline ordered their food, after which they were alone again.

As they talked, Eric wondered what conflicts Madeline would have regrets about. Was it how she dealt with Roxanne? That went rather extreme. Maybe she felt bad about some encounter with Lisa in the past?

“By the way,” Madeline took a sip from her wine, “I considered whether or not it was wise of me to ask, however, my curiosity has defeated me; why did you join Lisa’s merry band for a while?”

Yikes, that was a dangerous question. Could he be honest without seeming hostile to either side? Hm... having to keep up a consistent lie would be a pain, so he would have to try.

“I agreed with her that Sanctus could do with more democracy, or at least more input from civilians on government matters.” Eric explained, “I was against her riskier ideas, but it’s rather hard to even talk about desires for reform in public.” He explained.

“That sounds reasonable.” Madeline said.

“I didn’t expect you to think that.”

“I am no government official, you know? I am the daughter of a businessman. I just happen to run the student council. I uphold a system within the confines of the academy, I cannot influence policy.”

“Can I ask if you agree with her on some things, then?”

"I hold no strong opinions on her ideas. Short of her revolutionary sentiment, I vehemently disavow those. That said, there have been reform ideas of hers that, privately like here, I would concede the rationality and value of. I am not fond of the IVB's level of power, for instance. It hurts the Ignis Times' sales."

"You have to submit even the Ignis Times to the IVB?"

"Correct. I wish Lisa sympathizers understood that I am not censoring them for my own gain. I am doing so because I have to."

"I see." Eric nodded. Hearing Madeline's perspective after so long was honestly fascinating to him. Of course, she was always hostile to Lisa, but it wasn't like she was actually a passionate supporter of the government or anything. At least, not as far as he could tell.

"Say," he began, "Lisa always said that you hated her way more than she hated you. Is that true?"

"Yes." She said, sipping her wine, "I despised her."

"Can I ask why?"

"She made my job a living hell. She would constantly break rules, forcing me to act. She had not a singular grasp on the concept that maybe I was not her nemesis, but rather simply carrying out my tasks and responsibilities. Do you have any idea how many times I have been summoned by the headmaster to explain away her misbehaviors? I hold an abysmal reputation as student council president, just because of her!" Her voice noticeably grew irritated as she vented her frustrations.

Eric wanted to stop her, but she kept going; “Shikoba is worse, you know? She is my sister! I am associated with her in the minds of the people by default! On top of that, she infiltrates everything! The club system, the Ignis Times, the Sanctus Swans basketball team, who knows what she poisons next! And there she was yesterday, harassing you, too!”

“I, uh, am fine, don’t worry.”

Seemingly shocked by her own rant, Madeline shook up in response to his words, placing her hand over her mouth. “I must apologize! I did not prefer you deal with this element of my personality, excuse me!”

“It’s a fair thing to get worked up about, I understand.” He assured her.

“Oh, thank you so much. I must confess my heart sank when I realized what I had done! You are the one person I can talk to like this, I would hate to ruin this for myself.”

“I can imagine.”

“Okay, I’ve calmed down.” She giggled. “Thank you for your forgiveness.”

“No problem.”

It was then that their food arrived, both of them finished their drinks, and their conversation picked up again.

"I must apologize in advance for bringing this same topic up again, but talking to you about the rebels is fascinating; are you not bothered by the way Lisa and Shikoba do things?"

"How do you mean?"

"They take issues that you agree with, and link them with misbehavior and delinquency in the eyes of the masses, do they not?"

"Regardless of intent, I guess they do."

"It is no secret that I cannot stand her, but would you not also say that you would have a better shot at realizing the reforms you wanted if she just

d i s a p p e a r e d ?"

She didn't even emphasize the word that much, but it echoed in his mind. Shikoba was going to die. Maybe she was already dead. Eric saw what was going on here. She was asking him this in an attempt to rationalize or justify something that was now out of her control. The 'regrets' she mentioned may very well have been...

"Father!" Eric opened the door to his father's home office.

"Eric? It is too late an hour for you to be shouting. What is wrong?"

"I've got something important to show you."

Late at night, in an office building towering sky-high, Governor Morsus stared at the computer screen on his desk. A rogue attempt at assassination? What a pain. The last thing he wanted was for military drones to shoot down a famous critic of the government. The last thing he wanted to hand revolutionary radicals was a famous martyr for their cause.

“Shamus.” He called. Immediately, a young man with blandly short black hair and eager, violet eyes walked in. He wore a black sleeveless suit with a grey shirt underneath, and had a stiff posture. He looked like a rookie, but he was one of Morsus’ most valued allies.

“Yes?”

“Summon Luna Snowfield to my office in Sanctus tomorrow, first thing in the morning. I have an urgent task for her.”

“You want to assign her the job to protect Shikoba, correct?”

“Already up-to-date, I see.”

“But of course! You did give me access to your mails with your ministers, after all! I’ve got my notifications on for those!”

“Shamus.”

“Yes?”

“For you personally, I have another job.”

“I’m to identify this ‘Ace’ person who leaked the purchase and seize all data on their computer, correct?”

Morsus smirked.