

High School Runner Up

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The Beginning

Velvet mountains painted the background of a colossal stage embedded in the town square. Hundreds of witches, fairies, nymphs, and ravens gathered around. Curiosity gleamed in their eyes as they faced the stage. When a male fairy dressed as a clown emerged from behind the crimson curtains, the crowd pulled out their currencies. Auction day was about to begin.

On this day, criminals were dragged up to the stage. Chained at the neck and palms, they waited for the highest bid. The buyer would mend their ways. That was how Jackal Town worked.

The fairy stood patiently as the criminals were loaded up onto the platform. One by one, they ascended, lining up to face their potential owners. They absently stared out with cold, dead eyes. The fairy stepped towards the center and cleared his throat, "Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to this month's auction. Today, we have a variety of sinners. We will begin with the raven."

All eyes turned to the handsome young man with piercing blue eyes and long black locks. Black wings protruded magnificently his back. "Now. You all ask what he did. This man, ladies and gentlemen, rips out the hearts of innocent girls. He promises eternal love only to shatter it all in a second. He has left many traumatized in his wake. This senseless massacre of emotions must come to an end! Are you all with me?!"

The crowd's arms shot up in the air. "YEAH!"

"DOES HE NEED TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON?!"

"YEAH!"

The fairy surveyed his buyers satisfyingly. He breathed in excitedly and waited.

A powerful voice set the first price, "One million!"

The crowd whirled around to face a girl with short, purple hair, amethyst eyes, a pointed hat, and a sharp dress. She glowered at the raven as the fairy opened his mouth, "One million! Going once!" No one said anything.

"Going twice!" Silence replied. "SOLD! Witch Jillem, the raven, Kander, is yours."

As Jillem approached Kander, he shot her a disgusted look. She merely smirked. This was going to be fun, she thought.

Four long weeks had passed since the auction. In those thirty days, Jillem had tried to mend Kander's sin. Befriending him a little, she had recently given him a guidebook on how to be a gentleman. He read it and followed her command absently. However, this was not progress at all. His heart had to be in the words he said and the actions he displayed. His act had to come to an end.

Jillem called his presence into the living room. When she arrived, she found him reclined next to the fireplace. As Jillem sat across from him, he cocked an eyebrow. She raised the guidebook in her hand and stared at him intently.

"Do you think you can fool me, Kander?" He remained silent.

"Your heart is not in these benevolent deeds. Why is that?" He did not reply.

"Kander! What is the issue?!"

Suddenly, he snapped his head towards her. "GIRLS DON'T DESERVE KINDNESS! THEY ARE ALL FAKES! FAKES! THEY HIDE BEHIND SWEET SMILES PLASTERED WITH THE VILE MAKEUP OF A..."

"Kander," Jillem interrupted, "You can't say things like that. That's like saying THAT all men are heartless predators sucking the love from their prey, disposing them afterwards. But not all men are that way. And not all women deceive." Jillem paused for a moment. "You may have had a horrible

experience, but that does not mean all women are like that, Kander. You can't pave the future with the blood of revenge. Do you understand me?"

Kander averted his gaze and stared at the flames dancing in the hearth. Jillem sighed. She had to make him understand. Jillem abruptly stood, grabbed Kander's hand, and pulled him towards the city full of honest, pure girls.

Walking down the town's streets, Jillem pointed out several couples to Kander. She tried explaining and displaying how faithful they were to each other, how the slightest look or gesture held immense love for the other person. Kander merely glared with disbelief.

"How do I know this isn't all an act?"

Jillem stopped in her tracks. It occurred to her that he simply had no trust in girls. He was not willing to believe in love.

"Kander, truthfully, it is hard to tell. However, I have known these couples for years. I know where their love stands and how they feel for one another. What I am trying to make you see, Kander, is that there are good people out there. You just need to search for the right girl. And when that time comes, you'll know the true meaning of love."

Suddenly, Kander grasped her shoulders. He started directly into her eyes, penetrating her very soul. "Why are you doing this, Jillem? Why do you concern yourself with me so much when you know I am a lost cause?!"

Jillem did not flinch. She simply smiled at him. "Why do you ask? Well, that is because everyone deserves to be loved, Kander. Everyone." Jillem gently placed her hands on his. His eyes widened, but he didn't move. "Trust me Kander. You will find love some day. You will. And I will be there to help you every step of the way."

Kander's mouth dropped open. He couldn't believe Jillem's honesty and willingness to help him even when all he had done was tangle her life in a complicated web. Yes, she owned him, but she did not treat him so. He suspected that she took her money back, declaring a price couldn't be placed on a human being.

He watched her, as she strode over to a coffee shop and motioned him over. As he approached her, he couldn't help respecting and admiring her. She was something else. When he glanced at her, his eyes revealed the slightest twinkle. Jillem's eyes studied him questioningly. He simply placed a hand on her head and smiled. He was beginning to love.