

Title: The Silk Blade

A forbidden romance between an assassin and their target in a country where love is considered the ultimate weakness.

"My people, hear me. Love is a disease. For centuries, our kingdom has thrived not because of love, but because of strength. Because we have stripped away the sickness that weakens lesser nations—the sickness of the heart. Love is a disease. It blinds. It softens. It makes even the sharpest blade dull, even the strongest warrior weak. And weakness has no place in my kingdom. I have seen empires crumble at the hands of a lover's hesitation. I have watched kings fall under the weight of foolish devotion. But not here. Not while I'm in power. Here, we do not love. We do not falter. We do not bow to the foolish whims of the heart. We have strength. You are warriors, not dreamers. You are steel, not silk. And those who forget this truth—who dare to whisper of love in the shadows—will be shown mercy only in execution. We do not love. We conquer."

The first time I saw him, he was bathed in moonlight, standing at the edge of the white, marble balcony, oblivious to the shadow watching him. Me. I had killed before. Dozens, maybe hundreds. The weight of those lives no longer sat on my soul. Because my soul was broken. Maybe I didn't even have one. All because of the Ralagan clan. It was what they had made me into, carved into a weapon by a kingdom that feared love more than death itself. A monster. Love was weakness. Desire was dangerous. The heart was meant to be caged, never freed. And yet, I crouched in the darkness, my golden, bejeweled dagger twisting, and gleaming wickedly in my palm. The dagger that my *murdered* father gave me.

He was Prince Noah of Alarmore, heir to a throne that should have been stained in his blood but somehow it isn't. He was my target. My mission. And yet... I watched him, instead of killing him.

He tilted his head, a flicker of movement. "You've been following me for days," he said. His voice was calm, but there was something else there. Amusement. He smirked at me. "Are you finally going to do it?"

My grip on the dagger tightened. "Do what?"

"Kill me."

I stepped into the light, knowing I shouldn't have. He turned to face me fully, eyes sharp, calculating. Not afraid. Never afraid.

"Why haven't you?" he asked.

I didn't have an answer.

For the first time in my life, I had no answer.

Noah didn't run. Didn't call for guards. Instead, he leaned against the balcony railing, watching me like I was a puzzle to be solved.

"If you let me live," he said, "they'll just send another assassin."

"I know."

"Then why are you waiting?"

I had been taught that love was a weakness. That emotions were chains. But looking at him—at the way the wind tousled his dark hair, how his bright green eyes somehow managed to glow in the dark, at the quiet strength in his stance—I wondered if my kingdom had lied. If the greatest danger wasn't love, but hate.

I stepped closer. "You could leave."

"And be hunted forever?" He smirked once again, showing off a dimple on each cheek. "You'd find me again. I know you will."

"I wouldn't."

A breath of silence. "You're lying."

He was right.

I lifted the dagger to his throat, pressing the blade against his pulse point. I could feel it, steady and unafraid. Never afraid. "I could kill you right now," I whispered. I knew already I wouldn't though.

His fingers brushed mine, not pushing the blade away, just touching. A ghost of a touch. "Then do it."

I didn't. I couldn't. Instead, I did the one thing I was never supposed to do. I dropped the dagger.

Cassian caught it before it hit the ground. Causing a drop of blood to stain the marble floor. His blood. For some reason that infuriated me.

And then he smiled. "You're a terrible assassin."

"Shut up," I muttered.

"Run away with me," he said suddenly, the playfulness vanishing. "If they find out you failed, they'll kill you too." He outstretched his hand towards me.

I had never run from anything in my life.

But as I looked at him, I realized I would rather fall in love and be hunted than live in a world without him. So, I took his outstretched hand, and together, we ran.

Because love wasn't weakness. It was rebellion. A fire. And we had just created the sparks.

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