

# **Guns and Roses**

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*Krad is an aristocrat in 19th Century Great Britain, slowly decaying in an equally emaciated house. He is alone, with nothing but the sins of his past to bear him companionship-that is, until the faithful night he meets a dark thief.*

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# 1 - Tenshi no Uta

Krad Hikari bent low towards the piano as he gently moved his long, tapered fingers over the ivory keys, playing a slow, dark piece. It was as dark and gloomy as the room surrounding him; yet so full of emotion that Krad himself felt suffocated by it, and was thereby forced into the straight-backed posture of before, so as not to be overwhelmed by it. His fingers let up some of their intensity, and his hands instead ghosted over the keys, playing softer than before. Choosing not to watch his hands, Krad instead turned his pallid face towards the ceiling, where a single grimy, cobwebby skylight let in a narrow beam of moonlight through years of filth and decay. In a sort of melancholy way, Krad moved his head slightly to the left, so the narrow knife of light fell on his face, making his sunken features light up in a way that did not become the golden-haired recluse. Sighing ever-so-softly, Krad returned his attention to what he was doing, leaving the striking light for the ever comforting presence of the darkness around him. It's where he belonged, after all . . . forever more in darkness would he reside. It was his punishment. It was his destiny. To be an angel of shadows . . .

Krad reached the climax of his piece, his digits unconsciously regaining their zealotry as he concentrated hard on making that piano sing . . . just as his mother did, that long, long ago . . .

In his empty passion, Krad did not realize that he had an uninvited audience attending his performance, standing on the top landing of the stairs and leaning on the railing with arms crossed over a wide, toned chest. Deep, narrow amethyst eyes watched closely, yet at the same time detachedly, as the long-haired blonde played his symphony-for-one, noticing in particular as the moonlight played off the musician's sun-gold hair and pale, white skin. It almost made him seem angelic in countenance; yet, as the intruder noticed, this angel seemed quite at home in the shadowy darkness, indicating that perhaps he wasn't as wholly *holy* as he seemed.

Krad's climax decrescendo'd into a soft ending in the upper octaves of the piano-forte, creating a hollow, empty, and thoroughly eerie sound as the high-pitched notes echoed around the room, the sound waves bouncing off the barren walls of the Hikari estate. The figure, entranced by the utter sadness and emptiness of the house and its owner, slowly pushed off from the railing and quietly started descending the stairs, his footsteps muffled by years of dust.

Krad gently struck the last chord; his fingers remained pressed on the ivory, and he just listened as the old, tired mansion embraced his notes, and let them play about its empty, hollowed halls before they slowly lost their energy and faded away . . .

Only when the sounds had completely disappeared did Krad allow his fingers to leave the instrument, and drift to rest in his lap. He started contemplating about what he could play next, when suddenly loud, sharp clapping could be heard, coming from behind him.

To say Krad was startled was an understatement; he jumped up in alarm, upsetting the bench in his shock as he whirled around to face the intruder.

"Who is there?" As startled as he was, not a single drop of emotion slipped through his walls, creating

the illusion of Krad being very indifferent about the situation. A seasoned people-reader, such as our stranger, however—needed but look in the shadow-angel's eyes in order to tell what is going on in their depths. Krad's eyes were currently shifting back and forth in a fast pace, searching out the person who dare intrude on his solitude.

The clapping stopped, and finally a black-haired, grinning man stepped out of the shadows of the grand staircase, narrow amethyst eyes glinting amusedly at the blonde, who stared coolly back.

He stopped within three feet of the fair-haired musician, both of their eyes having a duel against each other, until Krad could no longer stand any more nonsense:

*"Who are you?"* He again asked, lowering the temperature of his stare a few degrees. The brunette stared regally back, not backing down on Krad's subconscious challenge. Krad, seeing that his glare had no effect, added, *"What do you think you're doing in my house, trespasser?"*

The black-haired intruder stuffed his hands in his pockets, and, ignoring Krad's demand, started walking around the room.

*"What a lovely house the Hikari estate is . . . though I'm afraid the housekeeper has been shirking her duties . . ."*

The man had reached the staircase once again, and with disdain he ran his fingers along the dusty banister, inspecting the grimy residue left there.

Krad was infuriated. Who was this man to come barging in here and parade around as if he were the owner of the estate? Who did he think he was? A Hikari?

*'Whoever he is, he is going to be dead in a few seconds,'* thought Krad.

And so, while the black haired man was busy complaining about the housekeeping, Krad crept towards a side-table drawer on the left side of the room inconspicuously, being sure to keep an eye on the intruder. Who was, meanwhile, examining one of the many Hikari paintings on the wall, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the grime on their surfaces.

The young Hikari, upon reaching his destination, slowly and silently opened the top drawer, rummaging around in the contents to find what he needed. Keeping an eye on the trespasser still, his long digits finally came in contact with stone-cold metal, and he pulled out the .32 millimeter pistol he had been seeking, smirking in triumph.

Still examining the portrait, the ebony-haired man froze as he heard the unmistakable 'chak!' of a gun being cocked.

Gulping, he slowly turned around, only to find himself staring down the barrel of a revolver. The angelic blonde held the weapon right up to the man's temple, putting too much pressure on the trigger for the trespasser to be comfortable.

The man was horrified. *'How could he have gotten so close to me without my hearing his movements?'*

*Surely ears such as mine could have picked up even the slightest rustling of his clothing—but I heard nothing!!*

Krad grinned manically; he had this cur right where he wanted him!!

“Now then, *maybe* I can get some answers from you! And it would be in your best interest to answer me,” he advised pointedly.

The black-haired man unconsciously shuddered.

“Begin with the proper introductions, if you please,” Krad commanded smoothly, lightly pushing at the man’s head with the revolver in an effort to make him answer quickly.

The man, eyeing the gun nervously, responded immediately. “I am Dark Mousey . . .”

Krad’s eyes widened immensely as he recognized the name. “Dark Mousey, the infamous thief? You’re in all the newspapers!!”

Despite his current situation, Dark let a small sliver of pride slip through his fear, “You have't right, sir; soon to be the most celebrated thief in all of history!!”

He was quickly brought back into place as he got a rather painful smack with the end of the blonde’s weapon.

“Silence! Don’t speak unless spoken to, knave,” Krad spat, glaring menacingly at the thief.

Dark shut up.

Continuing, Krad asked, “So your purpose here is to steal a work of Hikari art? Or is there something else in this house that you desire?”

Dark, keeping his deep amethyst eyes on the weapon held too close to his head, answered, “The Hikari paintings are famous to art collectors everywhere; I came with the intentions of getting my hands on a few,” he answered honestly.

Krad’s eyes traveled elsewhere; and for a moment his guard was dropped as memories—*painful* memories—washed over him briefly, before he tucked them back away in his heart.

But Dark, being trained to notice small details, did not miss the huge amounts of pain and hatred reflected in the blonde’s golden-yellow eyes before they became emotionless bullion pools once again.

“Were circumstances different, I would have you take them, take them **all** away! I hate them and would have them removed directly—if not for that damned will . . .” Krad was speaking of events and things Dark had no knowledge of, but once again he did not miss the hatred and anger spilling from the Hikari’s tongue as he said this.

“If . . . I may ask . . . where are the rest of the Hikari’s? I did not see a single soul but you residing in

this house!”

Krad exploded in anger. “Don’t you *dare* talk about them to me, you insolent cur!!” He yelled, smashing the barrel of his revolver into the side of Dark’s face. The thief was sent flying into the painting behind him, which snapped in half by sheer force of the collision; Dark himself crashed to the floor, his forehead bearing a gash from where the weapon’s shaft had come in contact, and a small trickle of blood flowing out from the corner of his mouth.

Grunting in pain, he slowly pushed himself up, wiping at his mouth with his sleeve. An enraged Krad was already standing over him, gun still cocked and ready, pointing at Dark’s head.

“How dare you breathe a single word about them?! You stupid man!! I’ll murder you!”

Seeing the deranged look in the blonde angel’s eyes, Dark started to fear for his life more than he had before; for now his mind could actually wrap itself around this situation, and could see his ultimate demise.

Frightened was an understatement. He was terrified.

“Wait! Don’t!!—not yet!! If I am t-to . . . *die* . . . I would at least have the name of my murderer . . .”

Dark was stalling, and Krad knew it. However, being brought up in aristocratic ways, he thought it would indeed be rude if he killed a man who didn’t even know his slayer’s name!

“I am Krad Hikari, eldest son of the late Hikari Senior and heir to the entire Hikari estate,” Krad arrogantly stated, raising his head a little in pride.

Not really listening, and panicking about his ever-approaching doom, Dark tried to stall further.

“Why are you living alone in this dreary place?—I mean not to stir you; I am just curious. You who have the entire Hikari fortune at your disposal, choose to remain anchored to a house that no longer has life? It makes no sense.” Dark silently prayed that the blonde aristocrat’s answer would be drawn-out.

Krad seemed angry at the prying question, but soon settled himself. He was going to kill this man anyway, right? It wouldn’t hurt to get the thousand aching secrets off his chest, just this once . . . it might even prove good to his ever-failing health . . .

Dark rejoiced as Krad set himself comfortably on a nearby armchair, the pistol set down on his lap and his sharp golden eyes trained acutely on the thief. He was going to tell a long story after all!! And that would give Dark time to think of a plan . . .

Krad glared delicately at Dark. “Let it be known, thief, that if you even so much as blink wrong, I will kill you. Do you understand?”

Dark gulped. “Perfectly.”

Krad sighed, and looked down at the revolver in his lap. He fiddled with it nervously, as he began to pour

out his heart to the stranger sitting on the floor next to him.

“Lord and Lady Hikari, my mother and father, were not the best parents a young boy ever had; it is little to say, then, that I had not much of a childhood. No, I was a Hikari, and I am sure that no one has ever heard of a ‘proper’ aristocrat having a happy, normal childhood. It usually consists, as mine did, of two things: Schooling, and the Fine Arts.

“I did not mind my piano lessons—it was the only way to get my feelings out in such a tightly aristocratic household—for everyone of high stature knows that frivolous natures and flamboyant romances only belong in the novels they read, or the plays they attend on Sunday evenings,” Krad began rigidly, with a hint of bitterness creeping up in his voice. Dark, who had many escape plans running through his head, started losing his concentration; instead focusing on Krad’s interesting tale.

Krad shook his head, and continued. “As for my schooling; I do not care to say much about it, for I have forced myself to forget those horrible times with my tutors long ago. It was said at my birth that I was to be a genius—I don’t know if that was true or not back then, but Lord and Lady Hikari decided not to let fate take it’s own course. No, they wanted to be sure—they had to drill in all the knowledge under the sun into my head of their own accord, to make me into a genius whether it was my destiny or not.”

Absent-mindedly, Krad pulled his long blonde ponytail over his shoulder and started to braid small sections of it, being sure to take them out when he finished with them.

“My parents themselves were wonderful artists—they were always painting in the art room when I had my lessons. Of course as everyone knows, we descend from a long line of artists, so it only made sense that my parents were also of that nature, and also that I would be one after them.”

At this, Krad laughed hollowly. “Except there was one minor complication; one minor fluke in the majestic Hikari clan . . . **me.**”

Dark, long since forgetting his perilous situation, asked confusedly, “You? What was wrong with you?”

Krad’s twin, fiery suns stared directly into Dark’s twilight-colored eyes, burning them with their intensity.

“Simply this: I could not paint,” he stated hardily, hatred blazing in his eyes. Hatred not at his parents, nor Dark; but a hatred for himself. “I could not paint, nor draw, nor engrave, nor sculpt—I could not even sketch the simple daisy, lying contentedly in it’s vase!! I was completely hopeless at prose, and ghastly at poetry. And that, my thieving friend, is as good as a death sentence in the Hikari family.”

Dark was astounded. “Really? Your family hated you just because you couldn’t *draw*? That seems highly cruel and unusual.”

Krad gave another hollow laugh. “You . . . have no idea.”

The black-haired thief shuddered. “Something tells me that the lack of such an idea is not a bad thing.”

Krad nearly ripped out the braid he had been working on, and threw his hair back over his shoulder in rising ill-temperedness. “Precisely my point. If I didn’t want to suddenly find myself destitute on the

streets, I had to find one of the Arts I was capable in—surely it comes as no surprise to you that I chose music as my profession, seeing as you barged in as I was practicing.” Here, Krad pointed a delicate digit at his beloved piano-forte.

Dark nodded sheepishly, grinning awkwardly. “Indeed,” he confirmed apologetically, rubbing the back of his head with a nervous hand. “You play beautifully,” he added as an afterthought.

Krad delicately rolled his eyes. “Whatever. I didn’t start out that way, let me tell you. As with everything else in my life, I was mediocre, and rarely impressed my teacher, let alone Mother or Father.”

Here was another rare occasion when Krad’s emotion’s built up to a point where he couldn’t breathe, and he broke his emotionless façade to relieve some of the pressure.

He sighed miserably. “Father was never pleased with anything I did, despite my efforts. I did try so hard to satisfy him . . .” Pausing briefly to sigh again, he continued. “Thus I worked harder than ever at my music lessons, spending every day and night of my childhood right here, seated on this bench. . .”

He patted the old, creaky piano bench with a loving hand, and Dark could see both adoration and hatred swimming through the other’s bullion pools. “Soon I had mastered all my books—Mozart, Beethoven, Bach—I could do them all, some even without any music!! It became apparent to me then, after my eleventh year, that my skills had surpassed those of the music master; thus I dismissed him, and started working on the art of composing.”

Dark was astounded. “That beautiful piece you were playing before . . . it was of *your* composition?!”

Krad nodded unenthusiastically. “Indeed’t was. One of my latest.” He sighed again.

Dark cocked his head in confusion. “You’ve just uttered to me a deed of great importance, yet you did so so *melancholy* that one would suspect the thought of such an accomplishment *wounds* you! Why does this talent bring you down so?”

Krad tilted his head to look at the ceiling. “I am glad that *you* think me of use, but the same could not be said of the late Lord Hikari. He never much cared for music-making, thinking it the lowest of the art forms. He thought me a failure, but always doted upon *Satoshi-sama* . . .” Krad paused, staring hatefully at a cracking ceiling tile as if trying to make it come down with just the fire in his eyes. Dark, slightly confused at the turn of the conversation, asked:

“This . . . Satoshi-sama . . . would be whom?”

Krad shifted his glare to the dark-haired thief before him. “Satoshi-sama . . . my *dearest*, effeminate little brother . . . and the apple of my father’s eye . . .” Krad ground out hardly, clenching his fists tightly. Dark was slightly intimidated by this show of maliciousness.

“I take it you have no love for your brother. When your parents died—reaching this conclusion only on how you call them the **late** Hikari elders—did you banish your brother from this place—seeing as you’re the eldest, thus receiving the inheritance, and the fact that he does not reside in this place?”

“My brother is dead.”

Dark quickly turned his choke into a small coughing fit. “I-I’m sorry.”

Krad’s eyes narrowed. “It doesn’t matter to me. He was *everything* to my parents, and I was *nothing*. He could do it all—sketch, draw, paint—and he was quite the poet, as well. To my Father, Satoshi was all I *wouldn’t* be. He often said to me, ‘Observe your brother, Krad, for the Hikari blood runs thicker in his veins than in any other who bear that name.’ He always said how proud he was of Satoshi-sama, and how ashamed he was of me . . . I am sure Lord Hikari would have renounced my birthright as heir of the Hikari Estate if he’d have lived long enough to do so,” Krad spat. Now extremely ill-tempered and feeling great fatigue, Krad wanted this tedious conversation to be done with, and this intruder to disappear.

“I’ve had enough of this conversation. It is time to dispose of you, thief,” Krad hissed, and seized his weapon once again. Dark set into panic, and jumped up from his spot on the floor.

“What?! You are still going to kill me, after all this?!” He didn’t have an escape plan, and the demonic angel was approaching ever nearer to him, gun cocked.

“Of course, you stupid fool! What, you thought you could distract me by asking my life story? Do you think I am that ignorant? I knew your plan all along—I humored you merely for my own devices and most assuredly not for yours!!” He shouted angrily, advancing on the terrified thief and backing him straight into a nearby wall.

As Dark looked on nervously, Krad suddenly broke into maniacal laughter. “Oh yes, I nearly forgot—I’ve still the end of the story to tell! You want to know how my family died?”

Resting the barrel of the gun on Dark’s temple, Krad leaned in towards the brunette’s ear, and whispered, “*I murdered them. Every. Single. One.*”

Krad stood straight again, and laughed hysterically, clutching his stomach with his free hand. “Every last one!!” He shouted happily, like a child in the innocence of youth, finding presents from Father Christmas under a regally-decorated tree . . . only he was not a child, and his merry disposition came from the thought of a bloody deed in the past done. A monstrous deed, indeed.

Dark gasped loudly, his eyes widening in horror. His body became ridged, and his entire world shrank to just the two of them; the homicidal blonde and the soon-to-be-dead thief, both of their fates intertwined by a single thread that was about to be cut. Cut off from the world forever, just as the other Hikari’s lives had been, by this angelic monster before him. Cut off, just as his life would be in a mere breath . . .

And yet, a question—one single question, chanting and chanting repeatedly in his head, overriding all his systems and feelings, bubbling up like crude from the denseness of his shock, spilling from his mouth as one simple word, whispered on an shaky exhale, “Why?”

So soft, yet Krad heard it anyway. “Why? Why what? Why did I kill them?”

Dark just stared wide-eyed before him, chanting “Why?” over and over again; mirroring his



disassembled thoughts.

“For everything!! For my lost childhood, spent trying to accomplish a task that was impossible—to make my father proud of me!! For years of abuse from my tutors, which my parents did nothing to halt!! For every second they ever spent lavishing my little brother with gifts, whilst I was cold and alone in the empty entrance hall, working my fingers to the bone on the clavichord, trying to be someone I very damned well wasn’t!—just to please people who had never loved me, nor thought of me as their kin!! Why did I kill them? NO!! The question is, WHY SHOULDN’T I’VE?!”

The blonde was hysterical, and the increasing pressure on his skull with the revolver told Dark it was about to come to a violent crescendo.

Suddenly, Krad smiled unsettlingly, and slowly moved the barrel of the revolver to point exactly between Dark’s frightened eyes.

“The question is, why shouldn’t I kill **you**?” And here, he slowly put pressure on the trigger, drawing out the tenseness for as long as possible, before whispering, “The answer to that, my friend, is death!—and I hope you are prepared for the here-after, man, for not even heaven itself can make me hold!!”

He pulled the trigger.