

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hey there welcome back! Not much to say apart from here getting quite too hot for comfort.

Well, that said, hope you enjoy the chapter!

THIS CHAPTER HAS NOT BEEN BETAED YET! (I will upload the betaed chapter as soon as I get it!)

Chapter 44: The Sorcerer and the Explorer

"So you are telling me you scanned half this side of the mountain and did not find any caves, that is quite the weird rock formation for a mountain."

The magic caster said in confirmation to the words he just heard from the scouts' leader.

"Yes Lord Satoru, though, we have managed to gather evidence on possible camp Chief, I mean, ex-chief Ziguru's son made, we have yet to locate him, we are following his tracks as he probably tried to find the entrance to the Dwarven Kingdom as well, so he might possess crucial information."

The leader said much to Satoru's satisfaction, that was a good point, he might have been alone, but the guy had searched for the entrance for far more than they did.

He made to leave the makeshift tent and return to his companions who were currently occupied to set up camp apart from Renner who was in charge of cooking dinner. This time around he would have to accept the food to avoid upsetting her, though he felt shitty every time he had to find a way to throw it away without arousing suspicion. Not only because it was food but also because it was handmade and seemed delicious judging by the others' compliments.

"Just a moment Lord Satoru."

The lizardman called for him before he could leave the tent. He turned back as the demi-human seemed to shift on place as if nervous.

"While we were exploring the mountain... we found a... female human i believe... she was friendly enough but she insisted for us to come back with us when we mentioned we were searching for an entrance to the Dwarven Kingdom."

He explained much to Satoru's surprise, he thought to be the only one searching for it but he couldn't deny the possibility of a traveler from the Empire trying her luck at it. Though he was surprised she was alone. In this world humans always went around in groups, like the adventurers from Re-Estize, or the workers from the Empire. For someone to travel alone in a zone famous for having dragons and giants roaming around, they must be either asocial, plain stupid or incredibly powerful.

"She also seemed interested in meeting you after she discovered we were searching for the entrance due to the agreement we made."

Well, that wasn't something new. Normally his paranoid self would have worried at this point, but really, he had gotten used to being a famous person by now and gave up on maintaining secrecy on his person entirely. He had created a kingdom-wide business from nothing, showed to be a magic caster on par with the most powerful human magic caster, purge 2/3 of the Re-Estize's nobility using an underground criminal organization he led and became a Marquis, all in around two years. Yeah, talk about staying under the radar... everyone who had the occasion wanted to meet him by now.

Though this annoyance could be turned into an opportunity and check out if she knew anything about the Dwarven Kingdom and why she was here to begin with.

"I see, where can I find this person?"

He asked, his interest piqued once more.

{Arche's P.O.V.}

The young blonde noble cut off her hair which grew quite a lot in the last month and were becoming annoying.

She was sure her mother would have a heart attack if she saw her right now. Her usual long blonde hair reduced to a short cut just above the collarbone. But what could she do? Traveling in a deep forest on unpaved roads with long hair was a nightmare! Her hair continuously got stuck in bushes and low twigs, not to speak about the insect who got stuck there, she shivered at the sole thought of having to clean her hair from those nasty creatures.

The first time she found a couple of insects stuck in her hair she almost fainted and screamed like... well... a child. Rayne had to personally remove the crawling creepy insects from her hair.

Unfortunately, that turned out to not be a one-time wonder, far from it. That event was a daily occurrence by now. After days of the same thing over and over even Rayne got tired of helping her out, forcing her to do it herself. She remembering gagging the first times such a thing happened, she almost threw up when the first time she had to catch one of the bugs in her hair.

She had no idea how Lakyus and Leinas did this, both of them didn't seem to be bothered at all by it. When she asked about it Lakyus simply said it was annoying but not unbearable, Leinas shrugged stating she was thinking about cutting hers short to avoid the problem.

It was this last one that gave her the idea of doing it herself.

She looked at her reflection in the clean water in the bucket she was given to wash herself this morning. She looked quite nice with short hair too.

“Hey.”

She was taken out from her contemplation by the gruff voice of her fellow apprentice.

She immediately turned to face him, he managed to sneak up on her while she was distracted and was now looming over her.

“Oh, it's you.”

She had long ago given up on trying to be dignified around the boy. He was a commoner through and through and lacked any

possible decency or language's properties. She blamed him for her newly acquired crass language.

“You cut your hair.”

He stated as if that was an unthinkable occurrence.

“What about it?”

She asked with some irritation, she would not let him give her shit about this. He immediately averted his gaze as a pink hue invaded his cheeks.

“Y-you look good l-like that.”

He stuttered out. Of all the things she expected this wasn't one of them, she expected some teasing or some crass comment on looking like a boy but instead it seemed like he had no intention of doing that, far from it, he complimented her new look.

That could have been a good moment to make some comments to get back at him for all the embarrassment he caused her time and time again. That would be the case if she wasn't as stunned as much as he was embarrassed by the whole thing.

“Uhm... thank you.”

She managed to say, not her most intelligent response but she was unsure how she should respond to this.

Was this boy, this buffoon, trying to... court her? No! that was absolutely absurd! There is no way such a thing was happening right now, he just said the first thing that came to his mind as usual, yeah... that was it.

Tense silence permeated the air as the two yet to be teenagers refused to stare at each other.

“So... why did you come here?”

She asked, trying to diverge the course of the conversation. The boy seemed taken aback for a moment before shifting on the spot and presenting her with an envelope she only now noticed he was carrying around.

“Here, take this.”

He said, still refusing to look at her.

She accepted the envelope and started unraveling it only to reveal... a scarf? She looked at the mundane object in puzzlement. It was red with yellow borders depicting little dancing flames, it was very well made and she wouldn't refuse such a gift, though, she remained unsure on the reason behind it.

Seeing as she wasn't saying anything, the boy finally turned toward her and gave her a nervous glance.

“This is from mom... she was scared you would freeze to death up in the mountain so she made you this... she also wanted to thank you for every time you went to our home and helped her with lighting the fire...”

E explained as he hid half of his face behind his own handmade scarf, which was a deep blue with small white lightning running across the edges.

She looked down at the scarf once again. She had no idea why she felt so sad at the view of that gift, she felt like she was about to cry, and she didn't understand why. Her mother gave her all sort of gifts when she was younger, as did her father. Opulent gifts that would make this scarf look like garbage... and yet, she could not shrug of the impression that this little thing was far more precious than any gifts she ever received before.

She immediately put it on as to hide the sad expression overcoming her visage.

‘It’s warm’ she noticed almost unconsciously as she wrapped the scarf all around her neck and lower part of her face.

‘Why? Why am I about to cry?’ she asked no one but herself as her vision was starting to become blurry as restrained fat tears gathered in her eyes.

“Ah... uhm...”

Rayne tried to say something but closed his mouth without uttering anything else apart small unsure noises.

She was causing a scene, she was sure of it, and yet, she could not stop the tears now running down her face.

It was one of the most humiliating things she ever experienced, right behind being ogled naked by that same boy now witnessing her crying.

“A-are you-“

He didn’t get to finish his question that she immediately slammed against him, hiding her face just under his chin, so that he could not see her tears fall any longer.

She felt as his whole body tried to escape her by stepping back but she blocked him when she clenched her arms around his torso. Locking the two of them in an embrace and making him tense up completely.

“He-hey-“

She clenched her grip around him even more as he tried to speak in protest to her actions.

“Shut up! I swear, if you say another word or move, I am going to burn you alive!”

She said with all the rightful wrath she could muster as she continued to cry.

“Just... let me stay like this... a little longer.”

She mumbled as she tried to relax against the tense boy who, on his part, didn't dare utter a single word or move a finger, letting her do as she pleased.

‘Just a little bit longer...’ she told herself as she felt the tears stop falling and starting to dry up on her cheeks.

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

The magic caster walked around the camp, humming a tune he did not remember the origin of. Lizardmen of all sizes and shades scurried around taking care of not stepping in his way. Apparently, he had made a reputation for himself in the last month, most lizardmen either were scared of him or, like the majority, started to see him as some kind of savior, mostly for the food he provided.

He already had many a lizardman bow to him in respect since he arrived at the encampment, much to his embarrassment and discomfort. He should have been used to it by now, between leading a criminal organization and being one of the most respected and feared nobles around. Though, there was something uncanny in seeing a different race other than humans do it. Maybe it was just him not being used to having around other races at all.

His musings were stopped when he finally reached his destination, the outskirts of the encampment. There, a lonely tent was erected, a small fire with unidentified meat roasting on it in front of the tent.

This was the place he was directed to in order to meet this strange solitary traveler.

Though, the probable adventurer didn't seem to be here, or at least, he could not detect any life force in the area, maybe she was not here, he stopped and tried to listen for any noises that could point him in a direction.

Though, the only thing apart the standard forest noises he could hear was the running water of the nearby river. Now that he thought about it, it wasn't unreasonable that she went to get some clean water from there.

He moved quite swiftly through the vegetation until he found himself on the riverbank. Said river was pretty large, an optimal source of clean water for the lizardmen, now that he thought about it, they set up camp here probably because of that river.

As he mused upon those thoughts his mind gaze's attention was caught by a bundle of stuff on the ground.

He made his way there only to notice that it was a bundle of clothes folded on the ground alongside some armored accessories. He refrained the sudden urge to go for them to analyze them, that would be incredibly rude and even creepy if the clothes belonged to the person he had in mind.

Although, the quality of the equipment had to be superior to the majority of the things he saw since he arrived here, maybe a quick look wouldn't hurt...

His pondering on how to proceed was suddenly interrupted by his instinct who screamed at him something was not right. He had barely the time to turn around and instinctively raise a hand to intercept the pole of the halberd aimed for his head.

He managed to grab the pole of the weapon stopping it, though the impact caused him to instinctively release a grunt of exertion. That was quite a blow and the fact that he saw it coming only at the last moment, even though he was distracted, spoke volumes of the skill of the wielder.

Speaking of which, said wielder was staring him up and down with an unreadable expression on her pale face. Though, that was not what attracted most of Satoru's attention.

He was suddenly grateful again for his Emotional Suppression as he had no idea how his dorky self would have reacted to a young woman barely covered in some arranged underwear as droplets of water run down her naked skin.

“My, my, look at what we have here... a peeper who wants to get a good look at little old me...”

She said mockingly, the accusation causing Satoru to come back from his sudden stupor.

“I... apologize for any misunderstandings miss... I was told you had expressed the wish to exchange words with me and so I came here myself... it seems like the timing was quite unfortunate.”

He tried to explain himself even though he was about to go and check out her clothes a minute earlier, something he would deny to his dying breath.

The black haired and eyed girl stared him up and down again, as if searching for any motion that could indicate deception before smirking.

“Unfortunate, eh? You don't like what you see big boy?”

Her lips curved up in a mischievous smirk that reminded him immediately of a certain princess. Though, this one was... far more predatory in nature he would say.

He remained silent as he didn't dare to give any reason for the conversation to continue in that direction.

“You are no fun.”

She finally said, after almost a full minute of silence, before lifting her weapon from next to his head.

“Now, unless you wish for a show, I would suggest you wait for me at my campfire, we can speak once I'm done here.”

She said as she gave him a sly smirk. ‘A mischievous one indeed...’ he could not help but think as he run away, masquerading his escape as a dignified retreat.

It was only once he returned to her camp that he noticed his illusory body was gone. That made him stop in his tracks, did he forget to cast it upon himself that night? No, that was not possible, he never failed to do so for more than a year, it was like basic survival instinct for him by now, as he felt the spell effect disappear each night he would immediately recast it

It was unconceivable he forgot to do so. Which left only one option out, his spell was disrupted by an attack powerful enough to surpass his passive resistance, but apparently not strong enough to bypass his defense and cause him damage.

That was worrying, he did not expect anything like that when he heard about this person seeking him out. Could she be... a player? No, that was too soon to be said, she might be just a powerful inhabitant of this world. Now he really felt like an idiot for not analyzing her equipment when he had the occasion.

He would not dare use [Discern Entity] on her, she might have countermeasures against Information magic, not to speak about he would basically open hostilities with her. That was not an option, not while he found himself before a complete unknown.

That didn't mean he would not be on his guard, he already silently casted a spell to identify any anti-teleportation magic but he found nothing, so it was safe to say he could run away at any moment if necessary.

“Are you brooding now?”

His attention was snapped back to the present by the voice of the young woman that just appeared from amidst the line of trees. This time around fully clothed.

“Are you regretting not staying for the show? Too bad... you lost your chance.”

She sang teasingly as she sat on the other side of the fire, opposite to him.

“Uhm, it seems about done.”

She noted to herself as she inspected the roasting meat that became a shining shade of light brown by now.

“What kind of meat is that?”

He asked, trying to break the constant streak of teasing he was being subjected to.

“Orc.”

She answered swiftly in a completely dead-serious tone. Silence stretched between the two of them. She took the meat off the fire nonchalantly and waved it around as if to cool it.

“You know, it’s no fun if I can’t see your expression, you are spoiling all the fun out of it.”

She pouted making her look far younger than she was, ending up resembling more of a rebellious teen than a young adult.

“I have been told I am hard to read.”

He said stoically as the black-haired girl took a large bite from her roasted meat.

“I can see that, this is actually the meat of a basilisk that lived not far from here, their tails are delicious when roasted properly... orcs have too much muscle to enjoy.”

She explained, much to Satoru’s surprise, he never thought he would have a culinary discussion over monsters’ meat today.

“Umu, I see, I am not quite proud of my culinary skills, though, your expertise makes me wonder, did you go up there to hunt and eat a frost dragon?”

He asked, the girl in front of him was proving herself either an incredibly easy-going individual or a skilled actor. A small laugh erupted from the young woman’s lips.

“My, how did you know? I never savored dragon meat, I would be quite ecstatic at the thought of learning what it tastes like...”

His question wasn’t supposed to be a serious one but from the answer he got he could say she took him down to the letter.

“I see, then again, we have lost focus of the conversation, what did you want to talk with me about?”

He decided to cut to the chase as this was bringing him nowhere.

“I wouldn’t say that... with our conversation I have already fulfilled my goal here.”

That alerted the cautious undead. ‘She already achieved her goal?’ he was frenetically going all over their previous exchanges to understand what he may have revealed by mistake. All he could remember was him talking about random stuff, trying to get a read on her.

“Oh, I see, did you now?”

He tried to bluff hoping his bravado would put her off.

“Indeed, you are a very cautious man, to try and sneak up on me and then retreat when your plan backfired... if you wanted a show, you should have asked, though you would only get one if you managed to defeat me in battle.”

She smirked.

This girl was fucking with him, there was no other explanation... there was no way she came to such a conclusion based on his actions if not to mess with him. He was starting to feel irritated by her constant nonchalant mannerism and that teasing tone. If she wanted to play, he might as well play along.

“You are quite the perverted minded maiden, to think the first thing you imagine when a man pass next to you, is that he wants to have his way with you is quite arrogant and self-centered... I was far more interested in seeing what kind of adventurer you were based on your equipment instead of your body.”

It was true that he didn’t want to antagonize the person in front of him, but it was also true he had some pride as a man and wouldn’t let this insinuation on his person pass so easily.

“Eh, if you say so...”

She seemed unperturbed by his comment as she took a new bite from her meat.

“Eh, you have a pair after all, I like that, the gods only know the last time someone dared talk back to me... it’s refreshing.”

Her smirk morphed into a more pleased smile.

“You want some?”

Even her tone changed as she offered him a part of her meat. All of it had been so sudden Satoru remained silent for a few seconds.

“I am fine, thank you, it would also be against my order’s rules to remove this mask in front of anyone but direct family members.”

He used the usual excuse hoping to not sound rude.

“Well, that just makes you more and more interesting.”

She said as she attacked the new piece of meat she previously offered him.

“You are quite the fierce warrior judging by the little I saw, I know the adventurers of the Kingdom well, and someone of your caliber would be quite famous there so... are you perhaps a worker from the empire? I am afraid I am not very familiar with those.”

He gently laid his trap, masqueraded as an innocent question. He gave her a perfect way out, he knew for sure she wasn’t from the empire, he made sure to amass information on many countries’ most prominent figures and powerful individuals during these years.

If she said she was from the empire he would know she is a liar and is probably some spy sent to find him or something. The same

would go if she said she was from the Holy Kingdom or Draconic Kingdom.

“Nah, I’m a wanderer and great food estimator, right from Slane, the country with the best cuisine in the continent.”

That took him aback, he didn’t know much about the Slane Theocracy apart from the fact they were some human-supremacists nutjobs. He really didn’t feel comfortable, and was quite paranoid, about investigating the only country he was sure was founded by players or Yggdrasil beings.

Who knew what kind of items could those guys have at their disposal.

He was aware of the contradiction in that way of thinking. He should normally investigate the most dangerous country the most, that was what a fool thinking themselves clever would say. The fact this was the most dangerous entity he knew of also meant that investigating it was the hardest thing, he had to move carefully and with many contingency plans that would lead an eventual discovery of his moves away from his person.

In short, he had to gather information using all manners of caution that could just bring him so far. He could not risk putting his nose too deep into it, one mind control spell or item could spell doom upon him as the enemy would not only get information on him but possibly feed him back false data without him realizing. That was why before believing anything he had it reported through three different sources all completely separated from each other.

“Hey are you there?”

His mind was brought back by the black-eyed woman in front of him.

“Umu, yes... I am just surprised as I never met anyone from the Slane Theocracy before... I gathered it is a beautiful land.”

He said hoping she would be prompted to reveal more details about herself or her land.

“Yes, it is, I haven’t lived there for much as I am always been an active child who preferred exploring other than staying put in one place for the rest of my life.”

That was a sentiment he could fully agree with. He had far too much personal experience in being stuck in one place with no way out.

“Oh, I can respect that, the thrill of adventuring and exploring the unknown have always been interests of mine as well... there is nothing better than find a distant land to explore to your heart’s content, who knows? Maybe even a worthy opponent to test yourself against.”

That was probably the first genuine thing he told the girl as he had no reason to hide some of his own more mundane interests and hobbies.

She gave him a smile, the borders of her mouth curving a little too much upward reminding him of one of Renner’s smirks.

“A lovely ambition, I myself enjoy the thrill of an adventure followed by a good hunt.”

She admitted, her tone far more pleased than ever before. She swept her hair aside as she gazed upward at the sky.

“Freedom is quite a beautiful sensation.”

She mumbled under her breath, though Satoru didn’t miss it thanks to his enhanced hearing.

“For all this is all well and good, you still didn’t answer my question, why are you seeking me out?”

He decided to cut to the chase and ask directly what he wanted to know. Not that he expected to know the real reason but whatever she said would be a lie he could cross out of the equation.

The woman blinked as her gaze returned to his mask.

“My, I was just curious to meet such a prominent figure and see what all the fuss was about, a man so incredibly fearsome and ruthless, patron of the people and one of the strongest magic casters ever known... passing that up would be foolish, even more for an explorer like me, who delights in looking into the unknown.”

He had to admit, the young woman was good, she was incredibly good at this, if he wasn’t sure there was something strange about her he would believe her genuine. Though, in this world, you didn’t become that powerful and still remain under the radar, solitary explorer or not.

“I see, then may I ask what you plan to do now?”

He questioned the black-haired woman who just gave him a light smile.

“Well, I was thinking about joining your group if you would have me... it is kind of a chance in a lifetime to be able to explore an isolated land like the Azerlisia Mountains, not to speak of the famed Dwarven Kingdom, a dwelling of ancient arts like Runecraft.”

She said a little more enthusiastically.

Satoru brought a gloved hand to his chin, the idea was interesting and dangerous at the same time. This woman in front of him had proven herself to be dangerous, maybe the most dangerous person he met since coming to this world. Having her alongside his group was a risky move, though outright refusing would mean alerting her that he knew what was going on, which could prove not to be the smartest move.

He had no idea who she was working for, the whole Slane thing might have just been a move to try and misdirect him.

If he refused her here and now it would be a loss on both sides, he would not be able to uncover who sent this woman and what they wanted, he would only know that someone was on his ass without knowing who or why. She would not be able to gather direct information about him, but nothing stopped her from stalking his group from afar and gather what she could.

If he allowed her to come, she would get a good spot to gather information on him but would be restricted in what she could and couldn't do. He would also be able to choose which information to share and maybe even feed false data to his potential enemies. She didn't seem to have violent intention toward him so that was an advantage he should exploit. Not having to fear a sneak attack while being able to gather information directly from the source was an inviting prospective. Of course, there were risks as well for this course of action. He would need to be constantly on guard for any information leaking or any other suspicious moves.

But as Punitto said many times over, greater opportunities always come with greater risks.

“Well, where are my manners, asking to join your group without even presenting myself.”

The woman took him out of his train of thought as she stood up, stretching her petite body accompanied by a quite adorable grunt.

“Name’s Lin, pleased to make your acquaintance Satoru.”

She offered her hand to him. On his part Satoru didn’t let the lack of etiquette bother him as he shook her hand noticing the unexpected strong grip the petite woman possessed.

“Same here, now... you seem quite strong so I would be a fool to decline your help, even more since we already know what kind of creatures we might face up in the mountains... though, if you are coming with us, you will abide by our rules.”

In response to his demand the young woman just shrugged.

“Sure, no problem with that, though... I have a question.”

She looked up at him with that almost lazy grin on her face.

“What is it?”

He asked trying to mask his nervousness behind his usual calm tone.

“What do you think frost dragon’s stew tastes like?”

Her velvet tone took a creepy turn as her smile widened even more making Satoru almost shiver. ‘Why is this giving me déjà vu?’ the undead asked no one as the realization that his decision might not have been the brightest dawned upon him.

{Satoru’s Mansion}

{Hilma’s P.O.V.}

The blonde in her early twenties sat behind her desk as two figures entered the room. Satoru had been quite busy since he

left and with the lizardmen being taken care off it was about time they started working on their side of the deal.

“I thought this would be a private meeting?”

She questioned the older and fat man who made his way toward one of the chairs in front of her desk.

“Miss Hilma, this meeting could not be more private, allow me to present my granddaughter, Silvy... come here and take a sit dear.”

The man said as the girl bowed deeply to Hilma before sitting down next to her grandfather. The blonde scanned the new figure, red hair arranged into a bony tail and deep grass-green eyes. She stared her down to try and get a read on the girl, but her face was inscrutable even under her hard gaze. The second in command of Seven Hands’ rolled her eyes but decided to go along with this.

“If you say so, anyway, I hope the guild is ready to move as Satoru ordered, is it not?”

She questioned the man again who had to force his scowl down.

“Yes... Sir Satoru’s demands will be met, I already spoke with the appropriate Masters, though many found the idea of commerce with demi-humans... displeasing.”

He admitted giving her a staredown.

“It is a good thing then, that it will be you who will organize and make the appropriate preparations Goldfinger.”

Hilma rebutted expecting another scowl from the man, surprising her when it didn't come.

"I am far too old for that type of work, I am no longer in the condition of traveling around the country and still take care of affairs here, that is why I entrusted this responsibility on my flesh and blood, Silvy."

The man said in a tone that did not allow for compromises, he would not budge on this one.

Immediately Hilma's gaze returned to the girl, her expression didn't change during their conversation, remaining as flat and unexpressive as before.

"This girl? You are entrusting a country level operation to a girl who just stopped sucking on her mother's tits yesterday?"

She questioned in her usual business-like tone. In truth she did not care about the girl's age, Renner proved by herself that age was nothing but a number. She just wanted to test the girl and see what she was working with.

The result didn't disappoint her. Her comment clearly broke the girl's façade, but she refrained from making a comment or prompting any change in her facial expression apart from the twitch of an eyebrow and the quiver of her lower lips as if she was trying to stop herself from saying something.

Her acting skills were acceptable, but the fact remained that she still had to prove her worth.

“So, tell me girl, how would you proceed on this matter?”

She said, now fully focusing on the red-haired girl who seemed taken aback for the first time by her intense stare.

“What am I working with?”

She finally asked revealing having quite a velvet voice. ‘She recovered quickly enough... and this is a valid question, you taught this one good Aruma’ the blonde ex-prostitute thought, being slightly impressed by the girl before her.

“You have the Merchant Guild’s resources at your disposal, we can accommodate some of Seven Hands’ resources as well, but that is only if they turn out to be indispensable... we would be most displeased for this endeavor to turn out too expensive to make a profit out of.”

That was quite the lie, Satoru had informed her that this would be a project that would see them inevitably losing money but gaining something far better in return than simple funds. Though, she was curious to see how the girl would handle an unwinnable situation as her first assignment. ‘Let’s see if you are cut out for this little bird’ she mused to herself as a slight smirk formed on her face.

“I will not let you down Miss Hilma.”

The girl said, surety in her tone. ‘We will see about that’ the acting leader of Seven Hands’ thought as she gestured to the two of them to rise.

“Then I think we are done here, please send the next two in as you go out.”

She dismissed the two who said nothing apart from a swift farewell.

“I think you went a bit too hard on that one, she was about to make a mess of herself.”

As soon as the door closed, the muffled voice of her usual masked companion reached her.

She sighed in exasperation, she had already given up some time ago from having the masked caster listen in to conversation she shouldn't. To be fair, there wasn't much Hilma could do to stop Evileye from listening on these private meetings apart having them while the little imp was away, which wasn't such a common occurrence as it was during the first weeks of her stay.

She wasn't sure if the caster just lost interest in the city or just found annoying her a much more entertaining endeavor. She, personally, would bet on the second.

“If she wants to play with the big boys she might as well understand from now she is just a little fish in a sea with many scary monsters.”

Hilma said as she finished signing the last letter and sealed it while she the door opened once again to let in the next two important guests of this evening.

She noticed with the back of her eye, how Evileye grabbed one of the random reports from her desk and began reading it, clearly disinterested in what was going on. She suppressed the need to get infuriated or even shout at the rude behavior. It would just be a waste of energy, as the blonde caster could do whatever she wanted until Satoru came back, much to her chagrin.

“Sit.”

She ordered more harshly than she intended to, prompting the two girls to immediately take the place of her previous guests.

Hilma took a deep breath as she tried calming down.

“So, you two sent me a message for an urgent meeting, I hope for you this is indeed an emergency.”

She said while the two girls exchanged a glance.

“Yes, miss Hilma, there is a grave situation going on at the moment.”

The younger, Angelica, said as the older, Clarice, nodded in confirmation. Those two were noble daughters of low ranked noble families neighboring Satoru’s territory.

In short, it could be said that they were part of the Satoru Faction, a small faction of nobles created after the massacre of the Noble Faction and a good portion of the Royal Faction. As the unofficial name suggested, the members of this faction gave their full support to the new marquis, probably in fear of what could happen to them otherwise.

For the most part, the faction was composed of lower ranked nobility with small territories neighboring directly or indirectly Satoru's sphere of influence and territory. Barons and Counts cowered in fear at the thought of what would happen to them if they displeased the noble magic caster backed by the Crown and so decided to submit in exchange for peace.

These two girls were selected to take care and watch over Satoru's betrothed, the second princess Alysanne. The fool had caused enough damage by her public show just before Satoru left the kingdom and had to be reined in before she did anything even worse.

That is where these two came in, they had the objective of looking over the princess and making sure she didn't do anything extremely dumb. The rumors flying around were already enough without adding anymore scandals to them.

Normally nobles would be ridiculed after making such a scene, and their reputation would take quite the hit, the only reason why no one dared to say or whisper anything even after such a public display was because of who Satoru was. Everyone still remembers the march that took place more than eight months ago, when hundreds of heads were cut off in a single night. No one wished to be the next on the magic caster's list.

Though, this will not last forever, no one may say anything, but everyone was seeing it.

A more direct initiative had to be taken as the princess could not be trusted to behave on her own. Luckily for them, the princess was extremely isolated, and it was easy to have her grasp for any social contact resembling something similar to friendship.

“So, go on, speak.”

The young woman prompted the two to reveal what was the troubling matter they had to report in person.

“It is about Lord Erik miss Hilma.”

Angelica began as she bit her lower lip in hesitation. The older woman felt like groaning in frustration, the fool had been a thorn in their side for a long time by now.

The eldest son of Blumrush, an utter meathead who was only good for swinging a sword around or sticking his prick into the prostitutes he liked so much to frequent.”

What was even Blumrush trying to achieve by seducing the second princess? Sure, if it came out it would be quite the scandal but then what? The Crown would have to call back the engagement, that was mostly a loss on the Crown part as Satoru couldn't care less about marrying into royalty. Hell, if they wanted to anger Satoru, they had completely got the wrong princess in their hands as the only one the undead seemed to care about was Renner.

“What of that imbecile?”

She questioned, impatient to know what idiocy was going on right now.

“Well... he became far more aggressive in his pursuit, he is trying to get in bed with the princess at the moment...”

Clarice explained as Hilma’s jaw dropped a little, that... she did not expect. It was a thing to have a secret admirer you liked back while being engaged to someone else, it was a totally different thing to have a lover you tumbled with under the covers.

Was the marquis in the north mad? If this was discovered... hell! Heads rolled for far less than this! Did Blumrush really think the Crown would protect him?! Or that the Empire would step in?! that idiot was digging his own grave!

As silence descended in the room for some time as Hilma was analyzing this new evolution, the two girls started fidgeting in their seats, clearly unnerved by her silence.

“W-when she came to us for advice, we of course told her this was madness a-and that she should absolutely not go along with this!”

Angelica stuttered out as she was slightly giving in to panic as Hilma looked at the both of them.

“Y-yes, I would have told her to cut off contacts with him completely but... that could have had the opposite effect from what we desired, she is very much infatuated with him!”

Clarice added as Angelica eagerly nodded along.

“I see, you did good.”

Hilma finally spoke making the two girls sigh in relief.

“However...”

She began once more narrowing her gaze on the two noble girls who tensed up immediately.

“You will have to stop this folly now, murder it in the crib, I don’t care how, just do it... hell, kill the man if you must, I don’t care... but this ends here.”

The blonde woman said harshly as she could see the two’s panic at her casual mention of murder.

“Am I clear? I don’t need to remind you what would happen to your families in case the princess’ virtue is lost prematurely... and to another man other than her intended... do I?”

The two girls immediately shook their head to her rhetorical question.

“Good, you are dismissed.”

She said with finality in her tone.

As soon as the two registered her words they immediately stood up and almost ran out of the room.

“Princesses and knights in shining armors...”

Hilma muttered under her breath in exasperation, though the comment didn’t seem to be lost by her masked companion who took her head out of the report she was currently reading.

“The dream of every young maiden.”

She added even if Hilma could not say if she was being sarcastic due to the distortion of her voice.

“Speak for yourself, the only knights I saw as a young maiden were scum who deserved only to be gutted like the pigs they were.”

She left some of her bitterness out with that last one. Even she didn't know why she said so, it was strange for her to bring up something like that to someone as she despised greatly talking about her past with anyone.

“I see, I am sorry to hear that.”

That comment almost had Hilma break her neck by the speed which she used to turn her head toward the magic caster.

“What?”

The masked woman said as if not getting it.

“I think that is the first time I heard you apologize for anything.”

The taller blonde explained in a deadpan tone as she looked with almost incredulously at the short blonde.

“Who are you? And what did you do to the real Evileye?”

She questioned mockingly prompting the caster to tilt her head as if she was a confused puppy. Hilma did not know if it was her stature, but that gesture made the masked woman quite adorable.

“What is it? Cat got your tongue?”

She continued to taunt as this was payback for stealing stuff from her desk without asking.

“Shut up.”

The tone of her rebuttal was firm but quite childish if taken for what it was.

“Maybe next time you should not steal other people’s stuff if you don’t want to suffer the consequences.”

She said making her displeasure known with an undignified huff.

“That’s quite childish of you.”

The retort of the caster had the unfortunate effect of infuriating Hilma. ‘She didn’t just say that!’ the taller blonde felt her anger boil to dangerous levels.

“Look at that... the pot calling the kettle black.”

She rebutted with barely contained annoyance.

In all response the short, masked woman threw the report back at Hilma who caught it with her face.

“I am done here.”

By the time Evileye said that and Hilma removed the papers from her face, the magic caster was already on her way out of her room, slamming the door behind her.

“Well, I will consider that a win then.”

Hilma said smirking to herself as she looked the report over for any damages caused by their exchange.

{That night}

{Arche's P.O.V.}

The young noble shifted under her covers snuggling against her sleeping fellow apprentice, for all he was annoying, she could not help but use him as a source of heat. Now that they were so close to the mountains, the gelid air didn't make itself shy during the evenings and nights.

If this was the temperature at the base of the mountain she didn't dare to imagine how cold it would be higher up. Well, she would discover that soon enough as the lizardman had apparently uncovered an old path worth investigating, and their Master decided they would be the one doing the investigating.

She felt the boy behind her shift in his sleep and roll toward her. Judging by the breath she could feel on the back of her neck, they were no longer back to back.

'Stay still, will you?!' she tried scolding him in her head. Gods, he had to become a problem even when asleep. The moron...

She felt two arms close around her lower abdomen in an embrace as her back was pushed against his chest much to her shock.

"Oi! You idiot! Let me go! I will fucking kill you!"

She whispered angrily as she tried to free herself from his, admittedly, strong grip. Though, the flaying didn't seem to do much since as soon as she removed the cover to try and escape the sleeping boy, a cold gust of wind invested her forcing her to back down and snuggle against the only source of heat in the tent.

She tried to calm down the raging blush on her face as she felt the boy touch her where no other, apart from her maids, dared to touch.

She did not know why but she felt like her stomach was burning and her heartbeat was increasing. Though, it wasn't a bad sensation but she could not stop the thought of something missing during the whole ordeal.

Now that she thought about it, were boys always this muscular?

She had been mostly around robed boys all her life so she didn't really know how the average one would look under them, but the many muscles she could feel pressing against her back was quite surprising for a boy who didn't do much training in the physical department.

She almost wondered if... no! She shook her head immediately to push away any thoughts invading her mind. She was a noble daughter, an heir to a noble house! It would be unbecoming to even think such a thing!

And yet, her mind could not help but wonder in curiosity.

Being seen naked by a boy was scandalous, sleeping in the same tent numerous times with that same boy was outrageous... what did it matter if her curiosity made her unbecoming? It wasn't like anyone was there to judge her.

Feeling every muscle in her body tense up, she slowly moved her hand till she managed to get a grasp on somewhere on Rayne's flank. Seeing how he didn't react at all she began to move her hand gently down, as this was the only direction, she could go without twisting her arm.

She gently traced every muscle she came in contact with, until she reached halfway down his leg. Seeing how she could not proceed any lower, her hand traced back up his body. Again, analyzing every little detail and committing it to memory. She felt incredibly hot now, surely not in little part due to her raging blush.

She finally placed her hand away from Rayne's body as she wondered what in the world took over her to do something so embarrassing.

Though, she could not help but admit to herself. Boys felt nice to touch when they were not annoying the crap out of her.

A.N.

And cut! Oof that was a big one, quite a sedentary chapter but a much needed one in my opinion, now that the stage is set and pieces are in position, we only need to start for the plot to unravel!

Oh, and yes, puberty is a thing in this story. It is an important part of development for young characters after all, and I'm not making it like it never existed just because people are unable to accept all of us passed through it at one point or another. No matter how embarrassing it might be to remember.

I even had some of my female friends give me in-detail stories of their embarrassing moments/actions during puberty. And let me tell you, I will have to tone it down a ton just to not get in trouble. If you think Arche is being forward, you have no idea how randy girls get during puberty. Same goes with the guys. It's just a part of life so we will have to deal with it for the moment.

Well, that said, I hope you enjoyed the chapter.

Till next time! Stay safe!