

“Normal speech”

‘Thought’

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hello again. This time I really have nothing to say. Just enjoy the chapter and have fun!

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**Beta reader: Don Orbit (go check out his amazing works!);
SirWertsalot (words and stuff. Follow and Review to keep
seeing more of ZeroSenpai’s content!)**

Chapter 11: Departure

Panic now filled Ro Lente’s Castle. Guards, servants and nobles were running through the corridors and halls. Some shouted orders right and left as if they were trying to give some order to the mass of people.

This panic was caused by a single event. The third princess’ disappearance. That day, the castle woke up and discovered that their princess disappeared without a trace.

The castle was immediately on full alert. Everyone was forbidden from entering or leaving. The search started immediately and it found that another was missing. One of the princess’ handmaidens, Lakyus Alvein Dale Aindra.

Both girls’ chambers didn’t have any sign of fighting inside. It was strange. It was of course possible to abduct a child in the middle of the night and avoid causing a ruckus, but it was very unlikely

that whoever did it remained there after the abduction to remove any signs of their presence.

The only one to now have an answer to that mystery was the man walking calmly but quickly through the corridors. He wore a simple light armor and had his eyes fixed on his destination.

He stopped in front of an excellently decorated double door. After a moment, he knocked twice.

“Who is it?”

Asked the man inside the room. The voice was barely audible over the noise all around him.

“It’s me, Gazef, Your Majesty.”

The man outside answered.

“Come in then.”

Gazef did as he was ordered and entered the room.

The King’s private chamber was messy. Many objects were scattered here and there. ‘Did everyone forget to clean here? Or was it the king who caused this?’ Wondered Gazef inside his head while closing the door.

Even through the thick wood of the door, he could still hear shouts coming from the corridor.

“Did you find her?”

Immediately asked the king. He seemed older than ever. Gazef always saw him as a strong ruler, but right now even he could see the desperate father inside the man before him. And so, it pained him a lot to have to shake his head.

“No, Your Majesty. But while I was unable to find her or her handmaiden, I was able to find a letter signed by her.”

After saying that, the strongest warrior in the kingdom pulled out a letter from a hidden pocket in his armor. The king didn't waste time and immediately took it from his hand. After checking that the signature on it was indeed his daughter's, he raised his gaze from the letter to focus on Gazef once more.

“Where did you find this? I had the servants check her room countless times.”

The king said.

“It was more out of desperation than anything else, really. I remembered what the princess said to me few days ago. Her exact words were ‘Flowers have answers to mysteries sometimes’. At that time, I had no idea what she meant by that. I found that letter hidden between some white flowers. I saw her sitting near them many times so I thought she may have liked them. Of course, I didn't open the letter and brought it here as soon as I found it.”

Gazef explained. The king nodded and opened the letter. Silence descended in the room for about ten minutes. Gazef heard his king sigh repeatedly as he read the letter a dozen times or so before finally placing it upon his desk. The king closed his eyes as he placed both hands on his face to contemplate what to do now.

“Read it Gazef.”

He said after a few more moments. The Warrior Captain took the letter from the king's desk and began to read it.

Dear Father,

I hope you are the first one to read these words. I also hope it didn't take the Warrior Captain too long to figure out my little riddle.

Gazef internally chuckled at those words.

You may be asking where I and Lakyus are now, and even more, why we left in the first place.

Please do not worry. We are both safe. As you probably know, Satoru is leaving to see the empire. He hopes to expand his business to those lands too. We are currently traveling with him.

Please do not take your anger out on him. He is currently unaware of our presence. We will hide in his cart and reveal ourselves only once we are far from the capital.

I need to ensure that Satoru remains on the Kingdom's side. He is far more important to our country than ever before. The Magician Guild follows him, he has a lot of influence over the Adventurer's Guild and a place among the High Council of the Merchant Guild.

While I have no doubts regarding his good intentions and our good relationship, I can't avoid worrying about what the Emperor might try to do to sway him to his side.

The Empire is a place where magic is almost considered a religion. On the contrary, our kingdom does not look kindly upon magic casters to say the least.

If Satoru becomes an asset of the empire and joins forces with Fluder Paradyne, I'm sure the emperor will soon feel bold enough to launch a direct attack on us.

Considering all of this, I decided to intervene myself. I knew you would never have allowed me to go, so I was forced to do this by myself.

Forgive me father, but I will do anything I can to protect our country, even if my actions go against your wishes. I will ensure our kingdom's future and one day, I hope, I will make you proud of me.

Sincerely, your daughter.

Renner

As soon as Gazef finished reading he placed the letter once more on the desk. After a few moments of silence, the king spoke up again.

“Tell me Gazef, have you ever been both filled with fury and pride toward someone?”

Asked the king in a low tone.

“I can't say I have, Your Majesty. I only feel something similar when my men do something stupid to save people in complete disregard for their own safety.”

Answered Gazef. The king locked eyes with Gazef. The Warrior Captain stiffened as he saw tears in his king's eyes.

“Sometimes I think that the royal line is truly a stupid thing, Gazef. While I love my son, I am not blind to his many flaws as a future ruler... Tell me, how could I name him the next king, while my last child showed more willingness to sacrifice everything for the kingdom than all her siblings combined?”

Gazef didn't have an answer to his king's question. He too felt that way. The courage and intelligence the third princess showed

in that short letter truly shook him to his core. To think there was such a raw gem hidden in the castle... She was barely 8 years old and she was already ensuring the kingdom's future, disregarding the unpleasant consequences those actions will bring on her. She was willing to accept them all if it meant giving the kingdom a chance.

'Truly, what a splendid queen she would make.' He thought as a little smile appeared on his face at the thought.

"Gazef, go to my daughter. Protect her at any cost."

Ordered the king. Gazef's body tensed.

"My king, I can't possibly leave you here in this chaos. It would be too dangerous."

Protested the Warrior Captain. The King shook his head.

"I am old, my friend. If something happens to me, it will not be such a great loss. Instead, losing someone such as Renner would really be the greatest loss of all."

"Then I will leave my warrior troop here to protect you, Your Majesty. I will go alone. After all, it would unnerve Satoru if the whole warrior troop accompanied him to the empire. It may bring about a result contrary to the one Princess Renner wishes for."

The King nodded at the Warrior Captain's words.

"Very well then. I wish you a safe trip Gazef. Bring my daughter home unharmed... And if, while you are away, something really happens to me and none of my children are named king, I want you to recognize Renner as the new Queen."

The king ordered. Gazef nodded solemnly in reply.

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

Satoru sniffed the air around him. He could feel the perfume of flowers and wet grass around him. His choice of departing very early certainly was a good one. In his old world, such a thing would be impossible no matter how much you paid. 'I guess Blue Planet-san was right when he spoke about nature.' He mentally admitted.

Truthfully, he never understood his friend's obsession with nature before, but now he could admit he had a point.

He stayed inside the capital so much that he almost forgot what the world outside was like. Sure, he saw it when he first arrived, but it wasn't like he could take the time to appreciate his surroundings at that time. The blue sky with white clouds was truly a spectacle to behold and cherish as much as possible.

He currently sat on the front of his magically reinforced wooden cart. The wagon behind him was covered by a red cloth. In it were stored some items he wanted to bring with him for his business trip, along with some food. True, he could store all of it in his inventory and naturally, he didn't need food; but appearances must be maintained. It would have been too suspicious if he left the city without anything.

Initially, he thought about teleporting when he was far enough from the capital, but now he was rethinking his options. Why should he do that? It wasn't like he had a schedule to maintain. He could take as much time as he wanted. Surely enjoying a little trip would not hurt his business.

Sure, he wasn't at ease about leaving Hilma alone, but he had left her many message scrolls in case of emergencies and he also

ordered all his wraiths to contact him as soon as something strange happens. In case the situation escalated, he could always teleport back at any moment.

The horse that was pulling the cart was not a normal horse. It was a Golem Horse. When asked about it, he said that the reason he used it was because it couldn't tire out. The true reason, however, was because horses were unnerved by his presence, even if he hid his undead nature entirely. He couldn't risk having a horse panicking in the middle of the road.

That information, of course, would surely reach the ears of the Master of Carts. 'Jeez, that guy is already all over me after I told him I wanted to expand my business to the Empire. He is definitely thinking about how much money he can make if he could strike a deal with me on item transportation.' Thought Satoru, sighing internally at the thought of having to deal with more people.

A few more hours passed as he analysed the detailed map Goldfinger graciously gifted him. Truly, that man knew how to stay on the good side of people. 'No wonder he became the mediator of the Merchant Guild.'

He finally thought he found the perfect route to take. He wanted to avoid bandits or monsters as much as possible. 'Maybe I can spend one night in E-Rantel before departing again... uhm... yeah that's a good idea! We just opened a store there two months ago. I should pass by and see how they are doing. I'm the CEO after all.' He said to himself.

"ACHOO!"

He was immediately taken away from his thoughts as soon as he heard the noise of someone sneezing nearby. He looked around to see if someone was traveling on foot near him, but he saw nothing. His enhanced hearing allowed him to hear some whispering coming from behind him. He turned to see nothing once more.

He ordered the Golem Horse to stop and descended from the cart. He went to check his wagon and, as soon as he removed the red cloth from it, he immediately noticed two figures hidden between his magic items and scrolls. Two blond girls he knew far too well. He stared at them without saying a word.

“Uhm... g-good morning... S-Satoru.”

Stuttered out the older of the two girls, Lakyus.

“Good morning Satoru.”

Saluted him the younger and far more cheerful Renner.

...

‘WHAT ARE THE TWO OF THEM DOING HERE?!?!?!’ Satoru’s Emotional Suppression imploded as his mind went into full panic mode. It took him almost a minute to calm down and that was only possible thanks to the Emotional Suppression doing its very best.

“Renner, Lakyus... What are you two doing here?...”

He finally managed to ask in the calmest tone he could muster. Renner lightly smiled at him.

“We are taking a vacation with you of course!”

She said cheerfully. ‘You are too smart for this kind of thing. Don’t joke with me!’ He internally said.

“I guess no one knew about this little vacation of yours, right?”

He asked almost rhetorically.

“Exactly.”

Confirmed the demonic smiling princess. Satoru sighed ‘Just great... now I have to deal with this...’ He whined.

“I must take you back immediately. You are a princess and Lakyus is a noble. Your disappearance is no laughing matter. You should both know that... the capital must be in chaos right now.”

He said as he prepared himself for the inevitable return to the capital. Renner immediately stood up as her smile disappeared from her face. She ran at Satoru throwing herself on his black gown.

“You can’t! Please Satoru! I can’t bear to stay away from you all these months! I don’t want to be alone again! I left a message explaining where I went and how you are not to blame for it! Please let me come!”

She cried out in desperation. Satoru stopped at that. He cared for Renner. He truly did. She reminded him of himself, but no matter how much he liked her, he just couldn’t accept her request.

“I’m sorry Renner, but this is not doable. This is a very serious situation. I care for you too, and it is for exactly that reason that I must bring you back.”

He explained; Renner shook her head as tears gathered in her eyes.

“Please Satoru! Please let me come!”

She begged; Satoru was about to speak again when he heard the sound of horses coming toward him.

“Get on the cart! Now!”

He ordered firmly as he turned to face whoever was coming. The two girls obeyed and got in the wagon once more.

Normally Satoru wouldn't be worried about possible bandits, but now he couldn't risk the safety of those two, especially not due to an over confidence in his power.

As the horses got closer, he finally managed to identify the riders. He immediately relaxed. ‘Thank god, it is him.’ He thought as he waited for the horses to close the remaining distance. The horses finally stopped in front of him.

“Good morning Gazef, it is good to see you.”

Hailed Satoru, who was genuinely happy to see him ‘now it will be easier to resolve this mess’.

“Good morning Satoru, it is indeed good to see you. I imagined you would take the safest route toward the border. I'm relieved my intuition paid off.”

He said, while seeming as relieved as Satoru was.

“I think I may have taken something from the capital without knowing it. I imagine it is for that reason you followed me all the way here?”

Asked Satoru, already knowing the answer fully well.

“Yes, the princess can't leave without an escort. I was asked by His Majesty to act as her protector until she returns to the capital.”

The Warrior Captain explained.

“Ah I see... Wait! What?... have I misheard you Gazef? D-did the king truly allow his daughter to travel to a foreign country? You may be strong, but you are just one man, correct? No offense intended, of course.”

Said Satoru as panic was beginning to stir inside him once more.

“No offense taken, Satoru. And yes, I am one man. It is selfish to ask, but I would like to request your help in protecting Her Highness during this trip.”

Gazef said while bowing his head to Satoru.

‘Why? Why? Why? WHY ME?! I JUST WANTED TO HAVE A NORMAL RELAXING TRIP! IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK? DAMN IT!’ His Emotional Suppression kicked in as soon as his frustration escalated into an internal rant, calming him down once more.

He turned to Renner and he saw a surprised expression on her face. ‘What did you expect? It’s not like your father would let you run away you know?’ He internally said before sighing. ‘Ah... there is no other way then...’

“I see. Well, if you want to come, it’s fine by me. Though I don’t recommend bringing your horse along. It wouldn’t be able to follow us since the Golem Horse I’m currently using doesn’t need rest and can go for days without stopping.”

Explained Satoru; Gazef nodded, seemingly impressed by Satoru’s words, before turning to the soldiers that came with him.

“Did you hear him? Take my horse back to the capital!”

He ordered and the soldiers obeyed immediately.

{An hour later}

{Renner’s P.O.V.}

Everything went according to plan. Everything! Every single piece was in the place she wanted it to be. It was simply magnificent! She could barely refrain from smiling.

She didn't know Satoru was such a good actor. She imagined he would be able to fool Lakyus, but she must admit, if she didn't know he was acting she would have had some doubts.

'Perfect! Now all is set! My father believed me like the fool he is and every suspicion of Satoru's involvement are completely proved wrong with his insistence on bringing us back to the capital. I'm so excited! I will spend the following months at Satoru's side! Together as we always should have been!' The mind of the princess began to wander in all kinds of directions.

"Are you uncomfortable Renner?"

Asked the deep voice of her beloved. She immediately snapped back to reality. The four of them were now sitting on the cart; she and Satoru on one side, Gazef and Lakyus on the other.

"No, everything is fine. I was just too absorbed in my own thoughts."

She said in her childish tone.

"I see... as expected. This is the first time you have journeyed out of the capital if I am not mistaken. I imagine you are quite distracted at finally being able to see all there is out here."

She nodded in confirmation. 'The only thing I want to see is you and me together...' She said in her mind.

"So which path are we taking, Satoru?"

Asked Gazef, making the magic caster's attention return to the man in front of him.

“Uhm, I thought about making two stops in the Kingdom. The first in E-Pespe. We should reach it in 10 days. The second in E-Rantel which should take around the same amount of time. I have businesses to check in both cities, so we may remain in each city 2 or 3 days. From E-Rantel, we will travel right to Arwintar. That should take an additional 15 days by my estimations.”

Satoru explained as the Warrior Captain nodded.

“That is a good choice. It may take longer than the pass through the Azerlisia Mountains, but recently I heard rumors about Frost Giants roaming up there, not to mention the various sightings of dragons.”

Gazef said. That information seemed to have a certain impact on Satoru. He brought one of his gloved hands on his mask as he hummed.

“That is interesting. I may visit them in the future...”

Only Renner seemed to hear him.

In that moment of silence, a weird noise interrupted their current thoughts. Said noise was coming from the stomach of a blushing Lakys.

“I... ehm... I may have forgotten... to eat this morning.”

Stuttered out the embarrassed noble. Both Gazef and Satoru seemed to chuckle before the latter pointed his gloved finger at one of the barrels in the cart.

“There should be some food inside that one. Feel free to enjoy it; Renner, Gazef feel free to join her if you like.”

The magic caster said.

“What about you Satoru?”

Asked Renner.

“Oh, don’t worry about me. I possess a rare magic item that allows me to reduce the quantity of food and sleep I should normally require. It is quite useful for someone who is so very busy each day.”

Satoru explained.

‘I had no idea magic items could do that. If magic can alter the rules of the world so greatly, why are we putting magic casters down in the kingdom? They could be such a great asset, and still... That is what happens when you make noble titles hereditary. People will get lazy when everything is handed to them on a silver plate...’ She contemplated in her mind.

After eating, they continued traveling while having small talks about various matters within the kingdom, varying from gossip to politics. Some hours later Lakyus drifted into sleep.

Satoru summoned a blanket with magic to cover her before sitting next to Renner once more. The princess could relate to the girl sleeping in front of her. She was quite tired too. Even if the sun was only just beginning to go down, she already felt that her body was drained of all the adrenaline today’s events had caused. She was still a child after all, and that came with many limitations.

Slowly her vision got blurry, and her eyes began to close. Her head shifted and now rested on Satoru’s dark robe. She could take in that sweet smell that often rocked her to sleep. Before losing her consciousness, she felt something warm being placed all over her body.

{Hilma’s P.O.V.}

“I see you are all already gathered here. Good.”

Said the ex-prostitute as she entered the decorated room that served as Seven Hands’ meeting room. All branches’ representatives were already waiting there, yet none of them greeted her. That was to be expected. Even if their lives were far easier than when they led Eight Fingers, many still resented her and Satoru for the takeover.

‘Not counting the death sentence looming on their heads as soon as they try anything.’ Added Hilma in her mind as she sat on the last free chair at the table.

“I saw you all managed to complete the tasks I assigned you. Now, just as every month, I’m here to hear you out before announcing the next goals we have to complete.”

“Our spy net in the brothels is coming along nicely. My girls have a lot of tales to tell each day. Both from the streets and court. Nothing major to report.”

Cocco Doll said without hesitation. He was probably the one who adapted best to the situation.

“The gambling department is doing great. Most clients are our own men during their days off, so we know how much they can afford to pay. We also landed some big whales among the nobles. Since we renovated the various casinos, we have had a lot fewer problems in money management. Nothing else to report.”

Explained Noah Zweden, leader of the gambling department.

“The smuggling department is doing fine. We aren’t bringing a lot of illegal items in anymore, since we are busy with the transportation of magical items from city to city. Do you remember those groups of bandits we stroke a deal with? Some

of them got cocky and asked for more. When we refused, they attacked us. I asked the security department to deal with them. This is all I have.”

Said Arnie, leader of the smuggling department.

“As Arnie said, the only thing that happened this month was the unexpected clash with the bandits. They are now an example for all those who don’t want to cooperate. My boys are doing just fine, patrolling and recruiting in the lower districts. We had no more problems after the business with that priest two months ago.”

Added Mato, a bulky black-haired man, who took the position of Zero as the security department leader.

The other hands proceeded to give standard reports. Seeing that there were no major problems to address, Hilma took various sheets of paper out of her pockets and placed them in front of Mato.

The bulky man looked at them and then his gaze returned to Hilma without uttering a word in the process.

“This is a list of all the major Talent holders in the Kingdom. Your orders are to recruit all of them. After you gathered as many as possible, they will be divided between the various departments depending on what Talent they hold.”

She explained as all the other Hands nodded.

“How much should I... press for their cooperation?”

Asked Mato. Hilma looked him in the eyes.

“This list comes from Satoru himself. The more we get, the happier he will be.”

Every Hand froze as that name left Hilma's lips. It may have been months, but the terror that name brought to their hearts never diminished.

"That said, Satoru wants people willing to cooperate so do not force them to join. Try your best at persuading them with reasonably generous contracts."

She explained. Mato nodded as he took the sheets.

"Yes Ma'am, I will do my best."

"Very well then. If anyone has anything to add, please speak up now."

No one said anything.

"The meeting is adjourned then."

She concluded and everyone left the room with their new tasks to accomplish. 'I hope you are doing fine Satoru... That princess will never stop hunting you, but you don't mind, right? You are already used to repairing broken things after all...' She said internally.

A.N.

Shorter than usual, I know, but this is just an introduction to the Empire arc. Of course, I could not skip the whole travelling thing, now could I? Next time we are going to meet a very special someone I know a lot of you will love and we are finally going to enter the Empire's border.

That said, I know some will have some questions, so I will address them now. The king wasn't exaggerating when he said those things to Gazef. After all, Gazef is one of the main pillars who represent his power as the king. Since Gazef will be gone

for months, it is very possible that his enemies would strike during that time. As for the trip's length, I can only say that to go from E-Rantel to Carne it took three days by foot (I evaluated it as one day by using a golem horse). Now look at the map and judge for yourself.

Also, sad to say that I'm having some problems with my university. It depends on the teachers if they are going to be solved quickly or drag on for some time. Leave a review and tell me your thoughts.

P.S. I saw people in the reviews and PMs reminding me to not forget some characters in the empire. Do not worry, I have all of them in mind, but I can't answer you or I would spoil the story. Until next time!