

[Adam C. POV]

I walked to the mill after my talk with Odin, his words had told me more than enough about my target, but at the same time too little.

I still didn't know what to make of his words.

Perhaps that was the point of it.

I wasn't sure.

Pushing those thoughts aside, I continued on my way.

The mill was a few miles away, and the forest around me seemed to stretch on forever.

I had sent Lilia and my familiar away to investigate the Town at the north, not that there was a need for that, I was simply keeping her safe. If my... target was strong enough to represent a threat to me, they would simply stand in the way, making them a liability I simply couldn't afford to have right now.

The handle of my Zanpakuto, held firmly in its sheath at my hip, thrummed with an energy that resonated through me. I felt a wave of confidence knowing that with her by my side, there was nothing we couldn't face.

"I know," I muttered, smiling at what Zanryuzuki was trying to do.

The trees towered above me, blocking out the moonlight and casting long, dark shadows. My steps were long and heavy as I walked through the thick underbrush and over craggy rocks.

Every now and then, I would pass an old road, or the ruins of a once small cottage, and each time, I felt... nothing. And I didn't mean anything like I didn't care, but more like... the entire forest was... empty, void of... every possible sign of life.

It was... unnerving.

An entire forest, empty of life, with the only thing reminding me of where I was, being thick air with the smell of pine and moss, and the occasional stream of water trickling somewhere in the distance.

After a few moments of walking through the forest, I finally came to the famous mill. And as the locals had described in the bar. It was an old, wooden structure, surrounded by a low stone wall that had been overtaken by moss.

Beyond the obvious lack of maintenance, there wasn't anything special about the place, no magic power, no killing intent, no presence of any kind.

All I could feel, and see, was an empty place.

"You're... strong..."

The voice startled me.

It was a whisper in my ear, yet it reverberated around me as if his voice was echoing in the nothingness.

"And... good looking... how unfair..."

As I turned around, I found a pale disfigured man staring at me, his face just inches away from mine to the point that if any of us moved even an inch forward, our noses would touch.

Wasting no time, I jumped back, my hand reaching instinctively for the hilt of my Zanpakuto. It was very troubling how this.... guy had managed to approach so silently, so stealthily, without me sensing him at all.

"I bet everyone remembers you... they never remember me..."

The man was quite tall and... extremely skinny, his hair hung limp and lifeless, and his eyes were piercingly cold, nearly as white as his skin. He was dressed in a tattered robe that hung loosely around his gaunt frame.

"What's your name...?" The pale man asked, scratching his arms.

I narrowed my eyes at him, a frown tugging at my lips, just now realizing something... I couldn't feel his presence at all. It was almost as if I was staring at the wind passing by, not a person.

I couldn't feel his magic power.

His intent.

Nothing.

For all of my senses, spiritual, and physical alike, it was as if he didn't exist.

"Are... you ignoring me?" The pale man trembled, demented tears starting to well up in his eyes. "Everyone does, everyone always does..."

This... guy, no... this thing was dangerous... I don't know how, but my entire being was screaming at me that I had to end this right now.

Wasting no time, I lunged forward, my blade raised and ready to strike, as I blurred out of sight, closing the gap between us in one graceful, seemingly instantaneous motion, my blade poised to deliver the first and final blow.

However, before I could cut his head off, the pale guy disappeared out of sight.

"Where--" My words were cut short, as I felt the familiar sharpness of a blade slicing through my chest, spilling my blood onto the cold ground before me.

...What?

I had been... cut?

Before I could ponder on that thought, I felt the same sensation on my back, then my knees, then my arms, and so on, cutting me more times than I cared to count.

And just like that, in mere moments, I was standing in a pool of my own blood.

I hadn't felt anything approach me.

Even when the wounds appeared, I hadn't felt a thing.

It was... almost as if the wounds had always been there, and my body was just now realizing that.

"You're... still alive..."

To make matters worse, this... monster was somehow managing to cut through my defenses as if they weren't there.

No, now that I think about it... it wasn't that. It was... more my defenses weren't registering anything until it had already happened.

Meaning his power was able to trick not only me, but my power into ignoring him.

"Unfair... it's just... unfair," The pale man said, hitting his head with his hands, over and over again.

Since when had he been there...?

Never mind that. I need to figure out how his power works, otherwise he will keep cutting me until there's nothing left to cut.

"I have to say, I'm impressed with your... magic," I replied, concluding the best and easiest way to learn about his power

was by having him talk about it. "How is it that... you can do what you do... I can't help but wonder."

After all, I had yet to meet someone who is secretive about their powers.

"Impressed? Lies, lies LIES!" The pale man screeched. "How can anyone be impressed by my curse?! How utterly ridiculous!"

I remained silent, sensing I had opened a can of worms, for better or for worse.

"My curse... makes everyone ignore me, everyone forgets me, it makes everyone incapable of perceiving my actions, my existence, I can only make them remember me for a bit.... but it's just a matter of time before they forget my existence, and any memories of me..." The Pale man muttered, his voice cracking at the end. "So, I make them pay... for trying to deny my existence, I take their lives to give mine a meaning..."

So that's his power.

Imperceptibility.

That still doesn't explain how he dodged my first attack.

I feel like I only have one part of the puzzle.

"I..-" I started to speak, but as I opened my mouth a sharp pain seared through my right eye. Slowly, my hand flew up to my face and found a shard of glass embedded in my eye, as blood iced down my cheek and onto my chest.

Once again, nothing.

I didn't feel a thing until it had already happened.

No killing intent.

No movement in the area.

Nothing.

Just emptiness followed by pain.

If this continues... I will be in trouble.

I grinned; Odin wasn't lying when he said this would be a hard endeavor.

Perhaps I just had to fight like Natsu.

Bringing everything down with me.

Deciding to give that a try, I swung my blade down, shattering the entire area around me in a two-mile radius, sending slashes in every direction.

"I wonder if that--" Once again, another cut, this time in my Achilles tendons.

I gritted my teeth. I wasn't angry the pale bastard was cutting me; I was angry he was cutting me every time I tried to open my mouth.

Anywho... it seems that approach didn't work out as well.

....

I can't hit him, because I can't sense him at all.

And for the same reason, I can't block his attacks, at least not completely.

....

That gives me an idea.

If I can't hit him, then it's only fair to put him in the same situation.

Taking a deep breath, I raised my blade high, and as the pale bastard continued to cut my flesh relentlessly, I muttered.
"Judge all things in this universe. Zanryuzuki."

