

[Erza Scarlet. POV]

My boots pounded against the cold stone floor of the Tower as I dashed through the winding corridors, my heart pounding in my chest.

There was a desperate urgency in my movements, an understanding that every second counted, I didn't know what Jellal was planning, and what had happened to Adam, but I knew I had to stop this, once and for all.

Rushing through the motions, I continued pushing forward, until I was forced to halt in my tracks, when a pink-haired woman wearing a kimono, holding a katana appeared before me.

"Erza Scarlet, a pleasure to finally meet you. My name is Ikaruga," The mysterious woman introduced herself, a small, mysterious smile playing on her lips. "And I'm afraid your path ends here."

At this, my eyes immediately fell on the gleaming katana strapped to her waist, still within its sheath. And despite the fact that this was our first encounter, I quickly realized that this woman was not to be underestimated.

However.

I would not back down, not now, not ever.

"I suggest you step aside, or I'll be forced to go through you," I commanded, my tone leaving no room for negotiation.

Her response was a chilling smile, her eyes glinting with cruel amusement.

"Oh, how interesting," Ikaruga smiled, her voice low and taunting. "You think you can go through me?"

"If I must, I will," I retorted, my hand instinctively moving to my own weapon.

The air seemed to crackle with anticipation, the tension between us building to a fever pitch.

Ikaruga's smile broadened as she drew her katana from its sheath. The polished steel glinted ominously under the tower's dim lighting.

"Very well then," Ikaruga purred, leveling her blade at me. "Let's see what you're made of, Erza Scarlet."

And with those words, our battle began.

"Requip: Heaven's Wheel Armor!" I shouted, my magic enveloping me as I dashed toward her.

Ikaruga, seeing this, was quick on the attack, her katana slicing through the air with deadly precision. But I was ready, moving my blade to meet hers in a clash of steel.

"You're pretty skilled, but not nearly enough," Ikaruga commented, and before I could question the meaning behind her words, my swords and armor shattered.

I stumbled back in shock, my body exposed and vulnerable. She had destroyed my armor, in a single strike. "Requip: Black Wing Armor!"

As my new armor materialized around me, I pressed forward once again, my sword raised high.

"Mugetsu-Ryu: Yasha's Empty Flash," Ikaruga whispered, taking a step forward before slashing her blade at me, destroying my armor once again.

I gasped as the force of her attack sent me flying backward, landing hard on the ground. She hadn't delivered any external damage, but her cuts had managed to reach deep within my body.

My chest heaved with exertion as I struggled to catch my breath, my eyes narrowing in anger as I glared up at her.

Her sword style was very dangerous.

"Mugetsu-Ryu: Garuda Flame," Ikaruga muttered before sending a massive wave of fire rippling towards me.

"Requip: Flame Empress Armor!" I shouted, wasting no time in calling forth a new set of armor, one that would protect me against her flames.

"The Flame Empress Armor, very resistant against fire, but... still not enough, right?" Ikaruga asked, her voice laced with amusement, as once again my armor shattered after her attack.

Taking some distance, I jumped back, landing on my feet a few meters, my body still shaky from the impact of her attack. She was right. No one of my armor was enough to withstand her attacks.

But the results so far weren't because she was stronger than me. It was because I had let my worry turn me into a blind foolish idiot, once unworthy of its blade.

If I had kept my head cool, I would've won this already.

Instead, I had let my emotions make me forget everything I had learned so far. Everything Adam had taught me.

I will not make that mistake again.

"I apologize for my poor performance so far, there's a lot of things in my head right now, that being said," I said, my voice steady as I stood up straight, my sword at the ready. "It's time for me to show you what I am truly capable of!"

Ikaruga raised an eyebrow. "By all means, show me."

[Ikaruga POV.]

I watched as Erza advanced, her movements precise and filled with an undeniable resolve, it was almost sad.

Calmly, my gaze fell to the glinting blade in her hands, aimed straight for me, another blade to break, before breaking her spirit.

Taking a deep breath, I took a step forward, but as I did something in the air changed. I barely had time to register the sudden change in her movement when she was gone, leaving only the echoing sound of her battle cry.

Confusion momentarily dulled my senses.

That was, until a gust of wind hinted at her new location. She had in some way maneuvered behind me in the time it took me to blink.

In the span of a heartbeat, I pivoted on my heels, my katana at the ready. But by the time I had turned around, Erza was no longer there.

"What?" I muttered.

A soft rustle, a faint shimmer in the air, and suddenly the battlefield was filled with images of Erza, flickering like specters in the dim light of the Tower.

My heart pounded in my chest as I studied the scene.

Which one was real? Which was the right target? The answer was a mystery hidden within a whirl of scarlet hair and gleaming armor.

Has she always been this fast?

Pushing through the shock, I gathered my strength, as I surged forward, my katana raised, ready to strike. If I couldn't follow her movements, the answer was simple.

I would simply strike in every direction!

However, just as my blade sliced through the air, a blinding flash of steel cut through the dim light of the tower. It was as if time stood still, the scene painted in harsh contrasts of shadow and light.

Erza's real form materialized before me, faster than I could have imagined. Her sword was a streak of deadly silver aimed straight at me.

A silent gasp escaped my lips, my body frozen in the realization of my miscalculation.

"I wasn't a worthy opponent." I chuckled. Not to her, not to him.

Since when have I been this weak?

Then, pain exploded through me, my body reacting even while my mind still tried to comprehend the reality of the situation.

I was falling, my grip on my katana slipping.

And as I hit the ground, the afterimages behind Erza's movements vanished, leaving only the real one standing tall and victorious above me.

"Where's Adam?" Erza asked, tilting her head slightly as she sheathed her sword.

"Jellal thinks he killed him, but between you and I, I sincerely doubt that," I replied through labored breaths, trying to push myself up from the ground, but failing.

How pathetic, to lose in such a manner.

But still, it wasn't that bad. To lose against someone of such level, it was almost an honor.

"Where's Jellal?" Erza asked after a moment of silence.

"In the top of the tower, licking his wounds," I answered with a pain filled smirk. "But I doubt he'll be there for long. He's not one to give up easily."

With that, Erza left, leaving me on the ground, staring at the ceiling, blood pooling around me, as I found myself lost in my thoughts.

How...

Kind.

Her blade was one without ill-intent.

She had avoided dealing any fatal blows with her last strike, even though she easily could have.

Unlike Adam's, whose blade felt as cold as the embrace of death.

Now that I think about it. They were two sides of the side coin, one of darkness and light.

It was almost poetic.