

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hey there, hope everything is fine!

If you didn't yet I would suggest checking out my new Overlord One-Shot! "Stars of Darkness" an AU of Vol 2-3! Commissioned by our friend MrMagicMan!

Onto the Zesshi argument, I still haven't read vol 16, as 15 killed much of my interest into seeing more of the franchise. Yet, the thing I really dislike is her characterization as a zealot patriot, I don't think it fits at the few info we had about her battle maniac tendencies and her overall backstory as she experimented firsthand how shitty ST could be. I much prefer to use her for something more interesting in my fic.

So that is the reason why I will not ignore her backstory, but I will not accept the current status of her characterization in vol 15.

That said, a thank you to all my patrons!

Well, without further ado, enjoy the chapter!

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Beta Reader: JRS (It seems I'm a little late. Oopsie.)

Chapter 32: And the World goes on

"Are you sure there's nothing to be done?"

The bearded middle-aged man asked in a worried tone as if he was speaking about his little child.

“I’m pretty sure that’s the case. You see, back there, it’s all dented up... The hell happened to you? You got run down by a war troll?”

The blond girl behind the counter asked. The bigger man scratched his cheek sheepishly.

“More like a bunch of goats...”

He muttered to the astonishment of the blond. She heard weird stories all the time, but this was the first time she saw it with her own eyes. Now that she looked closer, the dents in the chestplate seemed far too similar to actual hoofs.

She felt the edges of her mouth arching up as she tried to remain professional.

“You are telling me... that you managed to get an enchanted chestplate.... almost irreversibly ruined... by having goats run over you...”

She summarized, as silence descended between the two, not even five seconds could be counted before they both exploded into roaring laughter.

“W-why didn’t you e-enchance it with some durability spells?”

The girl managed to ask between her spasmodic laughs.

“I-I didn’t have enough money... I-I had to c-choose between elemental p-protection or durability.”

The man admitted as he kept laughing.

The other clients were giving them strange looks by now, and the blond had to pinch herself to return to a certain degree of professionalism. After all, she dreaded to know what a certain

older blond would do to her if she came to know of this shameful display.

She may have started working here for only five months but the one she previously considered to be a kind woman turned out to be a devil in disguise. She shuddered at the sole thought of getting an earful from her by now.

Once the laughter subsided, the girl sighed, taking the chestplate from the counter.

“I will see what can be done to repair it... but I suggest you start looking for a new one in the meantime. From what I see here, it is unlikely our smiths or casters will be able to repair it.”

The man’s eyes shined at her words.

“Thank you! Thank you!”

The man said, shaking her hand vigorously before leaving.

The blond felt a hand on her shoulder, she turned only to be greeted by the grass green eyes of a boy around her own age.

“You got tricked Lakyus, you are too nice.”

The girl named Lakyus just tilted her head in confusion.

“But we offer a free first reparation policy, don’t we?”

She asked, confused by the boy’s attitude.

“Augh... you nobles...”

The boy sighed exasperatedly, passing a hand through his brown hair.

“That is only applicable if the damage is caused by an accident... that man is the son of a farmer, he probably had an accident with cattle... that does not fall under our policy.”

The older girl blushed from her neck to the root of her hair.

“H-how do you know that?!”

She half whispered, panic in her tone. The boy merely scoffed.

“You need to do like Miss Hilma said, always listen to what the client tells you and what they tell others... that man came already three times in the shop, and he once spoke to his friends about his father’s farm.”

The boy explained in a teacher-like tone.

Lakyus pursed her lips. How was she supposed to remember every stupid thing the people coming here said? She wasn’t an idiot, not by any means, but she still found it hard to remember even what she heard during one whole day, let alone months.

She knew magic casters were supposed to be somewhat smart, but this went beyond what she thought possible.

“You remember all that stuff? For real?”

She asked, more amazed than anything else, this time causing the boy to turn up red as a tomato.

“Well... not really, I just take in the information I think may be useful in the future, or to get a general feeling of who I am dealing with... it is almost like studying magic, you know? Just... more boring usually...”

The boy admitted, still making Lakyus feel inadequate for some reason. She was a noble, someone who received lesson after lesson by the best teachers gold could buy, and still, she was coming short to a self-taught boy younger than her. That made her wonder if the supposed pride of nobility was nothing but a mockery in the eyes of the other citizens.

“Shift is over by the way, help me tidy up and let’s have lunch!”

The boy said more enthusiastically as they proceeded to do their usual chores.

...

Lunch was usually a silent affair. It's not like Lakyus had nothing to speak about, but her and Arche's upbringing drilled in their skulls the etiquette expected by any noble child during meals. Rayne, on his part, wasn't one very talkative during meals.

And so, the delicious home-made lunch continued as usual.

Ever since she arrived to the capital five months ago, she had been placed here alongside the other two slightly younger children. It wasn't like she disliked the arrangement, on the contrary, she found being closer to people her own age very fun and stimulating.

She couldn't say she didn't miss her previous commodities, though... Following Satoru's instructions, she now had to care for herself, meaning that if she wanted to buy anything, she would have to do it with her own money. And if she wanted to get money she would have to work. Hence why she spent some of her mornings working in his shop.

She now had to clean her own room and living quarters, with Arche's and Rayne's help thankfully, and had to generally care for herself.

It may seem harsh, but Lakyus could not help but understand the older man's thought process.

Noble or not, she will not be pampered her whole life. There will come a time, no matter which path she'd choose in life, when she will have to care for herself, and this slap of reality would serve her right when she will have to move up in the world.

Or, at least, this is what Renner told her. And she was pretty sure the princess couldn't be wrong. She never had been, since the first time Lakyus met her.

Speaking of which, the princess had been the one to fill her in on what she missed during her period of seclusion.

Saying that she was shocked at first was an understatement, a rebellion of such magnitude was unheard of in the history of the known world. To think that while she was occupied with her petty self-indulging problems Renner was actually trying to uncover the whole thing was a maddening thought.

What kind of friend was she to not notice such a thing happening under her nose?

And to think Satoru was the one squishing down the rebellion, like it was a nest of nasty ants was quite unreal. She always thought that the respect she had for the duo could not possibly go any higher, but she found herself baffled by her own emotions.

She had five months to metabolize everything that happened, and it still felt like an unreal dream, as if everything was planned by a higher power and executed to near perfection.

Satoru's ascension to the highest grade of nobility wasn't even remotely as unreal after all that happened. She was sure the man would be a great boon for the kingdom. Also, she wouldn't lie, that particular event was mostly a boon to her.

When she first arrived in the capital, she was sure she would have to renounce her name and titles to finally get the freedom to do as she pleased, as her parents would not let her otherwise. Her dear friend, seeing how it pained her to do so, offered Lakyus a better path.

Seeing how Satoru was now part of nobility, he decided, after some advising from Renner, to take Lakyus as a ward, in a certain sense momentarily adopting her.

It was an often-used practice in the Kingdom, for a noble family to send a second son or daughter, or even their heir in some cases, to foster in another allied noble family. The rite strengthened bonds between houses and were used even to see if a betrothal was possible between the children of the houses.

Still, these bonds were usually practiced by houses with a history of long cooperation, something the noble house of Aindra and Satoru didn't have.

Normally such a thing would be seen as a scandal, but this was far from any normal circumstance. After the fresh reminder of who Satoru was and what he was capable of, no noble would dare defy him.

Her family had their hands tied up. They could not disinherit her without indirectly insulting Satoru, they couldn't even ask for her to be returned as he already took her in as a ward, and the insult may seem even greater than before.

It was political maneuvering at its finest, something Renner always exceeded at. Knowing that her friend went so far to ensure her freedom could do nothing but warm Lakyus' heart. The golden ribbon signifying her loyalty was still firmly tied around her wrist, as she could not bring her sword everywhere anymore.

“-you not done with it YET?!”

The loud voice of Rayne took her out of her deep train of thought as she returned to the current time and location she was in.

“Shut up! It's not like you mastered anything in it yet as well!”

Arche rebutted, making the other boy grimace.

“Still... I finished it...”

He mumbled under his breath.

“Yeah, without understanding one third of what was within!”

The other girl continued mercilessly.

By now Lakyus just ignored them as this was as common of an occurrence as the sun rising each morning. Those two did nothing but argue most of the time. It was kind of cute, like kittens roaring at each other, believing themselves lions.

‘Maybe it is a competitive thing? They are both Satoru’s apprentices after all...’ she mused in her head. . ‘A rival... uhm...’ the concept really fascinated her, her two teachers were rivals after all, and from their conflict they extracted their will to improve. She wondered if she should try and find a rival too.

The two magic casters were still throwing insults at each other, and seeing how the whole discussion was going to escalate she decided to put an end to it.

“Quit this at once! Both of you!”

Both of them immediately shut their mouths and cowered. In the time they lived together Lakyus obtained a kind of strict older sister status.

Since she arrived, she tried to organize their activities and duties in a methodical schedule, as if she was planning a training session. This was, after all, one of the things Master Brain taught her during training, optimizing time and energy to achieve the best possible result.

To say her two housemates were not fond of it was an understatement. For some unknown reason, they much preferred their chaotic way of living. It got so bad that at one point Lakyus’

patience came to a boiling point and finally challenged the duo to a duel to settle things.

That was the first and only time in which she saw them agreeing and cooperating to reach a common goal. Defeating her.

Unluckily for them, Lakyus had both the power and experience to be far more than they could handle. And so, after defeating them, her word became law inside Satoru's manor.

She sighed in exasperation. 'Is this what it feels like to be a leader?' she never ordered anybody around before those two, even her servants were never ordered around like this. She wondered if her circumstances brought her to be like this. Maybe... maybe it was killing... People said that killing changes you... Lakyus, on the contrary, never felt much changed after the tournament.

But maybe that was the point, changing without even seeing the change in the first place. She shook her head, that was not the time to muse on such things.

"Listen, let's finish up and start our afternoon routine, I am sure you have things to do as much as I do."

{Ro-Lente's Castle}

{Renner's P.O.V.}

The black-haired maid gently stroked the golden cascade of hair with a silver comb.

The third princess looked at her reflection, making sure her hair were cared for as she wished. After all, it had been Satoru who said he liked long hair in one of their many conversations in the last months.

She never cared much for her hair, but since then she started growing them and, since Lakyus was gone, she had to hire one of the maids to ensure they reached their maximum potential.

“My Princess, some say the Marquis of Flowers is increasing raids against the criminal life in his territory. Isn’t that a magnificent show of noble prowess?”

The maid broke the silence. ‘Old news... that fool is trying to poke the dragon again...’ she wasn’t impressed at all by Blumrush’s poor choice. The only reason he was left alive at all was to be a living weapon against Jircniv. If things ever went south, she could always use him as a scapegoat to justify a war against the empire. But she was sure it would not come to it.

She gestured for the maid to go on.

“The Lady of Dreams still entertains the Knight of Flowers, and my Lady of Sin is yet to leave the side of her beloved husband. How romantic...”

The black-haired maid continued her tale. It was always good to know how family members were doing.

“Thieves and rats seem all to sing the same song and praise the mighty darkness who protects them all.”

‘Nothing new to report in short’ the princess summarized in her mind.

The castle was a dangerous place, and she knew that her ears weren’t the only ones who could listen through walls. Also, she probably shouldn’t have let her father give her so much credit for the squishing of those vermin. Now she had far too many eyes on her and it was starting to annoy her to dangerous levels.

Every week she received requests for fostering her, or proposals for future betrothals from every single noble still alive.

Now that she showed just a little bit of her mind to those simpletons, they were all rushing to her like flies to a fresh carcass. It was simply disgusting, to think that in some alternative reality she could have been sold to one of those... things.

She felt the comb leaving her hair and looked as the maid settled it aside. She was one of the maids responsible for her womb lender's early demise. She was one of her favorites, she knew when to shut up and when Renner wanted to be left alone. She knew how to make her hair shine like gold, and she had just the right sense of subtlety to not be a nuisance to work with.

"My Princess' hair is very easy to brush, most ladies with such lengths of hair are a nightmare to care for."

Ah! She forgot to say that she was rather good at flattering, too. Not that Renner cared much for such empty compliments, she would rather receive a pat from Satoru for a job well done other than these empty bootlicking.

Speaking of which, it had been a week since the last time she visited him. She missed the time when she could do such a thing almost daily, nowadays she was filled up with paperwork and fake pleasantries to appease her fake image to those fools.

'It is for a good cause... In time, I will be able to spend every day with my Satoru'. That was the reasoning she used to convince herself and gather the strength to wake up every day.

Satoru himself didn't visit the castle often, if at all, even now that he was welcome as a member of the court. She was pretty sure that was due to the presence of her stupid sister, who could be nothing but a nuisance to him.

Oh, how she wished she had been born earlier... she could have been the one being betrothed to Satoru then, and everything would be alright by now.

Speaking of growing, she had been rather happy with her own for now. She had grown 3 centimeters this month alone. She gently caressed her crown which was currently sitting on her lap. Her first gift and token of Satoru's love for her. She felt like smiling at the sole thought, but she restrained herself, her true smile was only reserved for Satoru and Satoru alone.

"You have brushed the hair of many noble ladies to make such a statement, I imagine."

The sarcasm was clear in her tone, but the maid never stopped her movements.

"No, my Princess, but does hair even have a difference depending on which hole a girl crawls out of?"

Her sassiness was amusing to a certain degree, she reminded Renner of Lakyus, a great loss. It wasn't like she couldn't see her first friend anymore, but only now that she was no longer around she understood how much her presence meant to her usual day to day life.

She would have liked to retake her as her handmaiden, but circumstances forced her hand to take drastic actions.

The perfect plan would have been for her to be taken as a ward by Satoru but that was a childish dream that could not happen. It was already unheard of to have a royal child, no matter if she was the third princess, be sent as a ward to a noble house. And even if she could go against that, her sister was already betrothed to said noble, it would be a suspicious move and would be counterproductive in the long run. To reach her goal of becoming

queen she needed to be an active player in the game, she could not be relegated to the position of ward.

The thought of her sister being betrothed to Satoru was one she tried to avoid. The only reason resting her hand from having an example made out of her, like she did with her womb lender, was the knowledge that such a union would not come to be, and that Satoru was purposely avoiding her. Satoru was hers and hers alone! Her half-sister was only a stepping stone, an instrument to achieve the future they wished for! She was sure Satoru would be faithful to her until the time came for them to be tied together forever.

But she was just rambling now, it was time to come back to the here and now and stop gazing into the future.

“You are a smart girl Amy, I am sure you will go far.”

Giving some gratification to underlings was a great and easy way to ensure loyalty. She noticed this thanks to Satoru. It was such a foreign concept to her and the Kingdom classist system, but it had served her plans well, nonetheless. ‘Still, another thing for which to be grateful to Satoru for’ she thought, jumping down her chair after the maid was done.

“Should I go ask for Sir Gazef?”

Amy asked, bowing her head slightly.

“Yes, you should.”

Renner confirmed.

It had been hard to get Gazef to accompany her these last months. Of course, he never refused her, but she could feel the sense of awkwardness that assaulted him every time he and Satoru met. Something had clearly gone wrong between the two, but she had

no intention of interfering or letting such a thing interfere with her relationship with Satoru.

{Carne Village}

{Enri's P.O.V.}

The blond girl carried the heavy wooden bucket with both her hands, water shifting toward opposite edges rhythmically, following the movements of the girl.

“Hey little Enri! What are you doing?”

A man moving in her opposite direction asked. He was tall, taller than her father even, and he wore a shining armor set, like the one in her mother's fairy tales.

She knew this man, as he was one of the four currently living in her father's barn.

“I'm bringing water to mom! Sister needs it, she's fallen sick today!”

She said energetically, as the man chuckled.

“You must be pretty strong to lift that, are you sure you don't need help?”

He asked, concerned, but the blond only scoffed. She was Enri Emmot! She could lift all the water buckets she wanted!

To show her resolve she left the bucket hanging from one hand as she lifted the other to show her arm's muscles.

“I am the strongest! I can take care of myself just fine!”

She exclaimed before grabbing again the handle of the bucket as she felt it slip a bit from her other hand. A bold statement, but true nonetheless. Among the fellow 10 years old in the village, she was definitely the strongest, even stronger than the boys.

The man gave her a look before laughing at her antics.

“Sure girl! Keep up the good work!”

He said before ruffling her hair and leaving toward the forest.

Enri pouted at being treated like a little girl but proceeded with her duty without hesitation.

It only took a few more minutes before she reached her house. She settled down the bucket and opened the door. Her family didn't have a big house, well, no one really did in Carne Village. Her house consisted of a living room, used as a kitchen too, and a bedroom for her parents. She slept in the small attic. A space she knew she would soon share with her sister.

“Mom! I brought water!”

She cried out Her mother immediately came out of her bedroom, gesturing for her to be silent. Enri obeyed and followed her mother quietly.

As she entered her parents' bedroom, she immediately noticed the small child sleeping in the large bed, her reddish hair so similar to her father's.

Her mother immediately took her bucket and used it to fill the small basin next to the bed.

“Nemu's fever went down for now, it would be better to let her sleep and rest.”

Her mother whispered and Enri energetically nodded.

They left the room soon after and her mother used the remaining water to fill the iron pot in the hearth.

In that instant, a familiar smell invaded Enri's nose, making her smile.

“Are we having pork today?”

She asked, her mother nodded.

“Yes, we will need to wait for your father to get home though.”

Enri pouted at those words. Her father had been far too absent for her liking lately. It was a consequence of their increased wealth, but still, that didn't mean she would like it.

In the past, they could have meat only once every two months or so. Nowadays, they could eat it once per week. That shift came just a few months ago with the arrival of the adventurers. There were a lot of them being hired to go into the forest apparently, and many used border villages like Carne as a momentary base of operation for their quests.

At first Enri didn't like them at all, even less when her father allowed a group to stay in their barn for a price. They were loud and full of themselves, the arrogance in their tone was making her feel somewhat inferior.

Everything changed when one of the groups came back with one of their members heavily injured. Her mother took care of the wound and nursed the adventurer back to an acceptable level. In that moment, she saw the fear in the adventurers' eyes, and how they masked that fear of death they experienced daily behind a mask of pride.

She started talking to them, and she discovered many things about the world outside her village. As a child, she mostly thought that everybody lived like in her village, but listening to the tales of those adventurers who traveled all over the kingdom made her understand how much she was wrong and how much there was to see in the world.

Their newly acquired wealth, thanks to the rent paid by the adventurers, also pushed her father to go to the nearest city, E-Rantel, and start doing business there. That brought him to be away for at least a week each month, something Enri didn't like, but, after a talk with her father, acknowledged as a necessity.

It had been three months since the arrival of the adventurers and the whole village seemed to have prospered in that period. Her family wasn't the only one to have offered a place to rent for the groups after all. They seemed to give out silver like it was copper, and the villagers were smart enough to capitalize on it.

Enri herself was capable of counting, as her father taught her to do so in the last few years, and so was able to understand how much of a difference the adventurers' presence made.

The door of her house opening ended her musings on the past, as the figure of her tired but smiling father came into view. She immediately ran to him for a hug, which was soon returned as her father lifted her off the ground.

"Papa!"

She said joyfully as her father swung her around.

"My little En! You grew up even more!"

He said as he settled her down.

"Welcome back darling."

Her mother said as she went to kiss her father on the cheek.

"How was your trip?"

She asked.

"It went well, but I will tell you more over lunch."

He answered as his stomach gave a growl of agreement with the man.

“Did you bring me something?”

Enri asked impatiently. It wasn't like she wanted anything, even if most of her girl friends would have probably asked for some pretty dress, Enri wasn't really that type of girl. What she wanted was something else.

Her father smirked as he got an envelope out of his jacket and passed it to her.

“From your boyfriend, with love.”

He teased, making Enri blush madly and start stuttering.

“H-He i-isn't m-my b-boyfriend!”

She rebutted, outraged at the sole thought.

“Ahahah... young love...”

Her father said sarcastically, making her pout before turning and retreating from the losing battle.

While her mother was preparing lunch, she opened her envelope revealing a few pages of written text. That was what she wished for, a lengthy letter from her friend, Nfirea Bareare. The skinny boy who liked plants and lived in E-Rantel.

She first met the boy a few years back, he came to her village with his grandmother in search of rare plants which could only be found in the Great Forest of Tob.

He was being bullied by the other village boys as he was skinny and shy. Enri gave them a lesson they wouldn't easily forget. That event started their unlikely friendship. They could only meet each other once every few months, but the girl found herself oddly at peace in the presence of the awkward boy.

She even started learning how to write to send him letters while they were separated. It was only when she got to a decent level that she realized she had no way to send said letters to her friend.

Or, at least, that was until her father started to visit E-Rantel with a certain frequency. She couldn't still write as good as her friend did, and she was sure her letters were full of errors and far shorter than she wanted them to be. Still, she was improving every time they exchanged correspondence.

Ever since she spoke to the adventurers, she started asking her friend for more details on life in the city or if he knew of any of the places those adventurers spoke about. Her friend seemed eager to indulge her, and even do some research on the stuff she was curious about.

So it was no wonder that she got all excited when her father brought her letters from Nfi. It was not love! Not at all! No matter how much her father teased her about it! She was just curious about things, and her friend was helping her with it! That's all!

Shaking her head to set those thoughts aside, she immediately returned to reality and, with all the eagerness of a curious 10 year old, she started devouring her letter.

{Satoru's Mansion}

{Leinas' P.O.V.}

She swung her spear with perfect accuracy, aiming for her opponent's legs; it would have been a quick blow if it wasn't for her opponent's battle awareness. Her strike was dodged with a jump and a blade was brought down on her. Still, that would not be enough.

She already regained much of her strength since her curse was removed, and now her battle prowess was as great as during her

golden days. With elegance, she used the opposite end of her spear to parry the blow.

Her opponent remained there, in the air, unable to dodge what was to come next. Leinas brought her kick right into her opponent's lower ribcage. She, of course, held herself back as the power behind the kick was already amplified by her opponent's momentum.

As expected, the swordswoman was launched back by the power of Leinas' kick and landed on all four, gasping for air that had been suddenly kicked out of her lungs.

“L-[Light Healing]”

The swordswoman used her divine spell to heal herself from any bruises she would have sustained during their training. That signified the end of said period and prompted Leinas to sheathe her lance.

“Are you okay, My Lady?”

She asked, crouching down and helping her fellow blond up.

“I-I told you to not c-call me like that... Lakyus is fine.”

The other responded, as she was still catching up with her breath.

“As you wish, Lady Lakyus.”

Leinas acknowledged her mistress' wish, but that still brought a groan out of the shorter blond.

“Let's get inside, it's getting dark.”

The defeated tone of her mistress brought some guilt to the former Empire knight, but she had been the one to ask her to not hold back while training, so it could not possibly have been her fault.

Still, she could not help but admire her Lady in some way. She truly was a gifted fighter. Leinas was almost 10 years her senior and trained for her whole life in the art of fighting. And yet, her Lady was able to keep up with her for quite some time before her defenses eventually crumbled under her unrelenting assaults.

Losing to a knight 10 years your senior was nothing to be embarrassed about. But Leinas was no mere knight, after the extermination of her and her fiancée's families, she was asked by the emperor himself to become one of his personal knights. An honorable position offered on the top of the top in the Empire. She refused of course, she had a debt to repay, a debt of a life.

And so she began her journey to find her Lady. It was not as great an adventure as people would believe. All she had to do was reach Re-Estize's capital and ask around for her other benefactor, Satoru the magic caster, or as he was known now, Marquis Satoru the King's Justice.

She reunited with her Lady five months ago. Her Lady was a strange fellow in Leinas' eyes. She was wise for her age, usually coming to solutions Leinas herself would not have considered. She was no great thinker, but she could acknowledge the mental prowess of others.

Her Lady usually ignored basic noble etiquette in exchange for bluntness and convenience, a thing Leinas could respect as she was much the same in that regard. She also seemed to be unstoppable in her pursuit of power, and she didn't mean it in the bad way. She was not a power-hungry woman, not at all, she just acknowledged the reality of their world. Those with no power could do nothing but bow their heads and submit, her Lady told Leinas as much.

It took some time to finally have her Lady open up to her and share her dream with her. To create a world where strength didn't

dictate a person's future. A vision completely opposite to the current state of the world, a dream many would have scoffed at and belittled as a childish fantasy. Not that Leinas could blame anyone for thinking so, as that was the first thing that came to her mind once her Lady opened up with her.

But still, she could not help but admire her Lady's conviction and sheer willpower. She wasn't even a grown woman, and yet she exercised everyday and strived toward her goal one step at a time.

She trained with Leinas until her body was sore, and while it was recovering, she spent her time with the holy texts Lord Satoru kindly offered her due to her request.

She seemed to have found her way following the God of Water and his teachings about respect, acceptance, and kindness. Divine spells seemed to come naturally to her, it was yet another gift she received from life. And a welcomed one at that as she was specializing in healing spells, which allowed her to recover faster while still training one of her skills.

After a few minutes of walking the two of them finally reached the main structure of the mansion. Leaving what was once a garden, now turned training ground for them and Lord Satoru's two apprentices, behind them.

The new Marquis allowed Leinas to live there with her Lady, with the condition of her working to earn her place there. If there was something she learned in these last months was that the elusive noble detested slackers of any kind.

Most would never dream to force nobles to work like peasants, but he was different, for him showing one's diligence and willingness to better themselves in all fields was something to be praised and admired. Leinas could respect that and even found it useful as she

never before managed to grasp the art of bargaining, a skill that would have served well any noble with some ambition.

Most nobles simply didn't realize how many coins they were wasting everyday as they found the art of bargaining something beneath them. Something only poor peasants would do to try and steal what they were too poor to buy. One of the most foolish notions ever imparted to her, she noticed.

Bargaining was part of life itself, not only with money but with everything else. Bargaining opened the doors to far too many otherwise inaccessible paths in life.

“Hey, Leinas...”

Her thoughts were interrupted by her Lady calling for her attention.

“Yest?”

She gave her complete attention to the younger girl, who fidgeted on the place seemingly unsure if to speak or not.

“I was thinking... do you- I mean! How about... uhm... wouldyouliketobecomeanadventurerandcreateateam?”

The young noble blurted out with uncertainty clear in her voice.

It took Leinas a few seconds to understand what the younger girl asked her, but she didn't hesitate.

“If that is what my Lady wishe-“

She couldn't even finish before she was interrupted.

“NO! I mean... I don't want to force you! This is a path I chose for myself! I don't want you risking... well... that thing... happening to you again...”

Leinas physically cringed as her hand immediately went to her right cheek and eye, strong fingers caressing soft and healthy flesh.

For all her willpower and pride, the mental scar of that period still hunted her in her nightmares. She had no intention of returning to that situation, no matter what.

She was a knight, though, and her oath had value. Was her word so worthless that she would run at the first sign of danger?

The worst thing was that she knew the answer, for all it was shameful to even think about it.

‘Coward’ that word echoed in her mind like an incandescent dagger, stabbing through her guts.

She felt a reassuring hand caressing her back. Her eyes darted to the smaller figure next to her.

“It’s all right, I understand. I think I will manage alone just fine.”

She said, her tone more contained and sweet than Leinas ever heard her be.

And in that moment her soul wept in powerless anger.

{Hilma’s P.O.V.}

Having the boy and girls start working in the shop had been a great move from Satoru’s side. She appreciated his own way of lifting some of the most time-consuming work from her shoulders.

Now that Seven Hands were nestling into Satoru’s new territory, her workload got technically lighter, but at the same time more complicated as now Seven Hands’ link to Satoru was known by the most important people in the kingdom.

Most minor nobles let them be out of fear, but some tried to eradicate Seven Hands’ bases from their territories. A fool’s errand, to be sure. Seven Hands had become an integral part of

their cities' economy and social life. Trying to eradicate them was like eradicating the lifestyle of their own citizens. No wonder many of those nobles were facing rebellions left and right.

Even Marquis Raeven understood that it was useless to fight them and instead he limited himself to isolating them, avoiding further expansion. A peaceful cohabitation was the best they could hope for, unless they wanted to unleash civil war in their territories. But she doubted there would be anyone foolish enough to do so.

Her work was interrupted by the cheerful humming of a tune foreign to her ears, coming from the only other occupant of the room. A towering skeleton with crimson flames for eyes who was busy tracing lines on a map.

It was strange to hear such a melodic voice, that could come from anyone on the streets, coming from the dreadful undead, but Hilma could not help but be amused by it.

The truth was that the monster before her could be as sweet at heart as he appeared dreadful.

It brought a smile to her face to see him putting together what he had planned to be his next great adventure. For all he was good with business, the true nature of Satoru remained the one of an explorer who could not wait to unravel all kinds of mysteries and artifacts around the world.

She had come to realize it when he explained to her how he planned to explore the Azerlisia Mountains and find the runesmiths of the Dwarven Kingdom. The sheer joy, emotion and passion she could feel emanating from his tone were the strongest she ever registered during her time spent with the undead.

That idea had been stuck in his head for the longest time he told her, ever since he came back from his trip to the Empire, when he came into contact with a runic weapon.

Unfortunately for him, the events that transpired afterwards took all of his attention and the aftermath left him and her busy for months. But now that the situation had subsided for the moment, it was time for him to return to his original plan.

The two of them planned the best route for an exploration at the fullest of his possibilities.

That was why they started hiring adventurer groups to scan and map the Great Forest of Tob, as that would be the starting point that would then bring them to the base of the mountains.

Yes, that tiny detail always slipped her mind, he planned to bring with him a brigade of children.

Conjuring the image to her mind almost made her laugh. Well, initially he planned to only bring the princess and Lakyus, but then she made him notice how leaving behind his two apprentices wouldn't look that good and would wound the two's feelings, so they got added. Then that Empire knight started following Lakyus around like her shadow, and their little group became a full blown adventurer team.

Well, judging by his humming, he didn't seem worried at all. He seemed almost tranquil about it. Maybe that was just an undead thing, she wasn't sure.

“Uhm, Hilma, come here and take a look! There seems to be some kind of lake here... maybe we should make a quick stop to admire it?”

He called for her and she obliged, amused to know what else stirred the curiosity of her benefactor.

A.N.

Kukuku... and yes, the next Arc is going to be the Dwarven Kingdom! Hope you all are ready for I have a lot of stuff in mind for this one!

Ok this chapter had a timeskip, I'm sure you noticed, since I usually get asked the current ages of characters I may as well do a small recap as of now.

Renner: A little more than 9

Rayne/Arche: A little more than 12

Lakyus: Almost 13

Barbro: 20

Zanac: 18

Alysanne: Almost 17

Carine (1st princess): Almost 19

Satoru/Gazef: Almost 30

Hilma: 22

Ramposa: 55

Current timeline: 6 ½ years before vol. 1 canon

Hope you all enjoyed and I am curious to know what you think this next Arc has to offer, so, review/comment will you?

See you next time and stay safe.