

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hi everyone! I have just recovered from a bad case of author block that afflicted me for a couple days! Must be a bit of burnout after finishing Act I of Child in Black and White, which I suggest you check out if you haven't yet! You won't regret it!

Anyway, here we are with next part of this intermission arc! Hope you enjoy!

Chapter 94: Song of the Sky-Riders and the Black Rose (part 4)

Lakyus sulked alone, she needed to reorganize her thoughts after her talk with the tribe's leader. She had long past her reckless days of jumping into the unknown, even more if it was as dangerous as she was told. She had others to look after, which sounded weird to think of since the majority of them were quite older than her.

"S'hiraihyo... huh..."

That sounded like one of the names of the beasts Satoru talked about in his bedtime stories. That was the first thing to come to her mind when she heard the name.

Such a fierce beast... capable of controlling fire, ice, and lightning. It would be like facing a Fluder Paradyne in draconic form. A death sentence, even if they had Vullmitar on their side.

She was sure that Satoru could win with the proper preapartion. But she would never ran back crying to him for help... never again... that would show that all her growth, both physical and mental, meant nothing and she would still be at the starting point. And Satoru already had his plate full as it was.

She kicked some of the snow in frustration. Either way she would fail. And she couldn't even try it, according to what she was told, this beast was slumbering, and waking him up would cause him to go on a rampage on everything and everyone around him.

It was no wonder the tribesmen were so against her even getting close. She would not trust her and her loved one's lives in the hands of some random group she just met.

“Damn it...”

She cursed under her breath.

The blonde heard the crunching sound of footsteps upon snow come her way. They were not as heavy as Zaryusu's or Riyuro's, and Arche and Rayne would probably fly rather than get wet in the snow, that only left Leinas, her faithful protector, sparring partner, and friend.

She turned around to tell her that she still wanted to be alone for a while, but the words got stuck in her throat when she realized the one approaching her was not Leinas, but rather the chief's daughter.

Lakyus blinked, reassessing her situation before standing up.

“No, stay seated, I just brought you something hot, it is rather chilling today.”

The girl said prompting Lakys to seat back down as the black-haired girl sat in front of her, offering her a beverage of some type the adventurer accepted gratefully.

The liquid in the cup was light purple and looked very much like some weird potion... or poison. But Lakys was not one to back down.

She carefully sipped the hot beverage, blinking as the hot beverage rearrange her guts in a very pleasant way, warming up her body instantly, it was slightly bitter, but also sweet, she very much found herself enjoying it.

“Kaelin, was it? Thank you, I needed something like that.”

She thanked the young woman who just gave her a little smile as she sipped her own cup.

“Yeah, I guessed you warlanders would not be used to the cold up here.”

She teased the blonde adventurer who had no way of denying her words.

“So... you wanted to talk about something?”

The blonde asked curiously.

“Straight to the point? Let us enjoy this moment of peace a bit before that, would you?”

Lakys felt her cheeks heat up at the apparent cultural faux pas she committed.

“Apologies...”

She tried to backtrack but the black-haired girl dismissed her apology with a wave of her hand.

“No worries, my tribe likes taking their time when it’s not a matter of life and death.”

Kaelin explained.

“I see, then, if you don’t mind... I would like to ask you about this God of Annihilation, I am surprised I never heard of such a deity with such an outstanding title.”

Lakyus offered, prompting Kaelin to bring her hand under her chin in contemplation of her words. The blonde found it kind of cute, it reminded her of how sometimes Renner used to stare into nothingness while lost into her own thoughts.

“Lady Thanatia is one of the Eight Divines, she gained her title after the Great War in which she was said to have personally killed 17 Dragon Lords.”

Lakyus eyes widened like plates at the young woman’s words, not only because of the feat she described, but also because with her explanation, all clues pointed toward only one conclusion.

She felt her cup almost fall of her grasp before she caught it.

“W-wait... are we talking about o-one of the Eight Greed Kings?!”

She voiced the conclusion she reached only to elicit a scowl from the older girl.

“I don’t know how it is out there, but here I would suggest you refrain from calling the Divines that, some of the tribes members might decide to challenge you over it.”

The implications of those words were not lost on Lakyus. She of course knew of the Six Great Gods, but to think someone even worshipped the Eight Greed Kings was something she never thought she would hear.

“I-I see, my apologies... but if I may ask, why do you worship them? Didn’t they subjugate the whole continent? Slaughtering countless?... I mean no offense! I am just trying to understand you!”

She asked, making sure to not put any kind of negative feeling into her words, just curiosity.

Kaelin seemed to think it over for a couple dozen seconds before answering her, those purple eyes fixing Lakyus with unwavering intensity.

“I think that is a rather... one-sided way of looking at them.”

She began, making Lakyus even more curious to hear what she had to say.

“It is true that they violently subjugated the entire continent, but the continent was already subjugated long before they arrived, just by the Dragon Lords... that is what first started the Great War, the Divines saw the misery in which the races dwelled and wanted to free them from the Dragon Lords’ dominion, and they did it.”

The young woman explained before sipping her cup, taking a pause. Lakyus was not exactly convinced by those words, seeing how it seemed like the eight simply replaced the top of the pyramid without actually changing the system.

“They granted us choice, the ability to use their Tier Magic, so that we may rise in revolt if another tried to subjugate us, that is why nowadays, the few Dragon Lords remaining do not dare

declare themselves rulers of the continent any more, even long after the Divines' disappearance."

Those words stunned Lakyus to her core, her jaw moving up and down even as words still refused to come out, she gulped, taking another sip to wet her suddenly dry mouth and throat.

"D-do you m-mean to tell me t-that the Eight G-gree- I mean! The Eight K-Kings were the ones who b-brought Tier Magic to the w-world?!"

She managed to ask stuttering all the way, much to Kaelin's seemingly confusion as she tilted her head to the side.

"Yes, isn't that a well-known fact? Wherever else do magic casters think the tier system came from? Legends even say that the Eight Divines possessed a book with every tier spell in existence was described."

She dropped that boulder as if it was but common sense. And yet, Lakyus was sure this was the first time she ever heard this, or anything good about the Eight Greed Kings really. She was no student of magic, she would need to ask Arche and Rayne, hell, even Vulmitar, if they knew anything about this.

"Also, kingdoms as we know them today are also a system the Divine set in place, before that every creature lived in nomad tribes if not smaller groups, and only humanity with the Slane Theocracy had some kind of working self-governance over a land... we could say modern kingdoms are a result of the Divines' rule."

The more Lakyus listened the more she felt flabbergasted with each revelation. And even if she didn't want to believe them, she could actually offer no other explanation behind those inventions

since she was never taught where they came from. People just went about their lives as if certain things and concepts always existed.

But if the Kings really gave such order and advancement to the world, why were they remembered as monstrous killers and little more than that?

‘For the same reason demi-humans are seen as nothing more than mindless rabid beasts’ a traitorous voice whispered in her mind.

“How do you know so much about the Eight?”

Lakyus questioned, returning her gaze to the violet one of the young woman.

“I wanted to be sure you would not try anything foolish against S’hiraihyo.”

Kaelin ignored her question, giving Lakyus an unspoken answer on the matter.

“I already told you so, why are you coming back at that?”

Lakyus asked, taking another sip and feeling the hot liquid warming up her guts again.

“I have my ways of knowing you did not mean what you said, not completely at least.”

Lakyus’ eyebrow raised at those words, the more she talked with this girl, the more questions she had on exactly who she stumbled upon.

“You are a strange girl, you remind me of a friend of mine I can hardly read the mind of.”

The blonde pointed out, receiving a vulpine grin from the older girl.

“You are one to talk... never heard of anyone traveling with such a diverse group in my entire life... you seem like the type of girl who would have an interesting story or two to tell.”

Lakyus laid back and took a long sip from her drink, emptying the cup.

“That might be the case... I wouldn’t mind telling you, in exchange of another cup, that is.”

Lakyus said offering her empty cup to the black haired girl who took it from her hands.

“Would be happy to, you really like mulled wine, don’t you?”

Lakyus blinked at that, was that... what she just drank? The heat of her cheeks intensified as she reminded what happened the last time she had consumed alcohol.

Suddenly the freezing temperature was no longer a problem as she felt her cheeks burn hotter and hotter.

“Are you alright?”

The young woman asked, looking strangely at Lakyus.

“Y-yes! The cold must be getting to me... ahahah... I think I am gonna lie down for a bit.”

The swordswoman dismissed her worries with a nervous tone, which did not escape the older girl’s eye. The blonde stood up abruptly, making her way toward where her group set up her camp, or at least she tried, seeing how her vision was starting to swim, she tried to push through her dizziness nonetheless, putting one foot in front of the other. Her boots sinking into the deep snow.

It was no wonder it took just a few steps before she felt her foot landing on a not so stable spot that sent her tumbling forward. She prepared to impact with the snow before she felt someone save her at the last moment, grabbing her heavy coat and pulling her back.

“Never saw anyone getting tipsy over a cup of mulled wine.”

Lakyus didn't know if she should feel relieved at the last-moment save or embarrassed at the teasing tone of the older girl.

“Let me help you get to your tent.”

The blonde only managed to mumble something intelligible even to her in response as she accepted the black-haired young woman's help.

{Arche's P.O.V.}

The noble lady used her magic to fuel the flame in front of her, the brooch she sore might have served to nullify the freezing sensation, but it certainly did not make her feel warm.

They set up camp in a zone adjacent to the tribe's camp as instructed by the head-hunter. It was filled with snow, and uncomfortable to navigate, thanks to Vulmitar's work the zone was cleared in a couple hours, she would have helped if she wasn't recuperating her mana still. Not like she was close to her breaking point, but she didn't trust these people as far as she could throw them.

Her eyes darted toward the boy sitting on the opposite side of the campfire she was fueling. She felt her eyebrow itch at the sole sight. Her foolish fellow-apprentice had some guts, acting all smitten with that other boy. What even was that? She never took Rayne for someone playing for both sides.

It wasn't like she necessarily found that unnatural or disgusting. Still, she was pissed the one to be this way was the green eyed boy. If nothing else, just because the two of them... the two of them...

She stopped her flow of thought to a screeching halt. They were what? Friends? That was a given... lovers? Her heart skipped a beat at the thought.

As a young maiden at the academy, away from her parents' vigilant eyes, she had read certain books that were shared among her older peers.

Scandalous stories of common knight wooing noble maidens and princesses. Rayne was no knight, nor was he gallant, nor was he as handsome as such stories described.

But he was there when it mattered, he was the one she truly felt comfortable being around with, being herself with. And the way he made her heart pound with every passionate kiss or lingering touch, was something no other individual ever made her feel.

Was it really absurd for her to yearn for more?

That desire went against all the lessons she received as a young noble heiress. This could cost her everything. If anyone learnt of her relationship with this common boy, she would be ostracized, made a laughing stock of, even disinherited if her parents found it offending enough.

Her heart's desire could cost her everything.

It might be a spurt of youthful foolishness, she could very much imagine her mother say so. She would grow out of it, her father would say. And yet, if she didn't make a move now, she could lose

the chance forever. What claim would she have if they never became something official?

‘Stop it Arche! Since when have you become such a spineless maggot?!’ her spirit reignited with a fire that had nothing to do with the campfire in front of her.

Her eyes roamed over the robed figure of the boy she had set her eyes on, currently busy in dwelling over some concept or another regarding metamagic.

“Rayne.”

She addressed him by name, something she did seldom do. Her direct approach bore its fruits immediately as the boy’s eyes snapped away from the book to her.

“Y-yes?”

He seemed on edge, maybe her tone had been more serious than she wanted, almost scolding, but she could not back down for such a minor reason.

She gulped before steeling her nerves.

“I actually wanted to talk with you about-“

She interrupted herself when she saw a figure she didn’t notice till that point approaching Rayne from behind and then seating next to him.

Arche blinked for a moment as she took in the cute round face with a button nose belonging to the boy that have started her entire spiral of thoughts that brought her to this moment.

“H-hey, i-I just wanted to thank you for saving me... It was rude of me to not approach you earlier... but I was not in my right mind.”

The feminine looking boy stuttered out in that raspy, slightly croaking, voice of his that contrasted fiercely with his demeanor.

“Ah, uhm, it was nothing... really, I caused you to fall in the first place.”

Rayne seemed taken aback by the approach and tried to wave away the boy's thanks.

“Saving my life is not something I would refer as nothing... here, I made this for you.”

Arche's eyebrow raised vehemently, wasn't this the same boy who threatened them ferociously when they first approached? How could he act so meekly and shyly now?

The black haired boy offered a small bundle of clothe to the caster who took it, clearly curious, he unwrapped it to reveal some sort of white bread?

“Ah, thank you.”

The green eyed apprentice thanked the slightly older boy who seemed to be expecting something. Rayne awkwardly moved the bread to his mouth before biting down on it. He seemed to struggle slightly as the bread was apparently harder than it looked.

“it's sweet.”

Rayne exclaimed in surprise as if marveling at the fact.

“Thank you, it is really good, can I know how you made it?”

At his question a bright smile blossomed on the black-haired boy's face, a smile that Arche did not like at all as alarm bells started ringing in her head.

“Oh sure, it is a classic of our tribe, flour, milk, sugar, nuts and berries, let it cook in an oven till the outside goes from snow-white to slightly tan, like our skin.”

The boy exclaimed enthusiastically slightly shifting closer to Rayne as he explained the ingredients and process.

“Oh, I hope you can show me one of these days, I have been trying to learn some cooking myself.”

The caster said as he took another bite much to the slight reddening of the black-haired boy’s cheeks.

‘Oh, HELL NO!’ that was all Arche could scream in her head as her mind finally clicked and actually came to realize what was happening in front of her.

Rayne could be as dense as he liked, but she would certainly not let him get swoon in front of her! Gods help her! if this boy wanted to play, she would match him move for move!

The blonde noble moved swiftly circling the fire and sitting on the other side of the boy, making sure their sides touched in what could be seen as an intimate move.

“Can I have a bite?”

She interjected as she pushed herself even more on Rayne who, much to her pride, did not even flinch at the intimate contact, conveying exactly the message she want to.

“Uhm... sure?”

He offered her the sweet for her to take. But instead of taking it with her hands as expected, she bit down on it, on the exact same point he bit before her. The sweet was indeed harder than it looked

and a tad too sweet for her tastes, but here it was the message that mattered.

She glanced at the black-haired boy, he had lost his smile as he was glowering at her, much to her satisfaction.

“Sorry but, who are you again?”

She asked with fake enthusiasm and a tip of irony. The boy hasn’t even introduced himself properly, and apparently he did notice too since his cheeks began to redden.

“I am-“

“Ash! Come play with us! We need one more for a game of topball!”

The boy was interrupted by a group of boys and girls led by an older one on the cusps of adulthood.

“Not now Reg, I am busy.”

The cerulean-eyed tribe member waved away the young man’s proposal much to this last one’s displeasure.

“You should not waste your time with some outsiders... weren’t you the one who always boasted about your riding prowess? Oh, how the mighty have fallen... literally this time.”

The older boy mocked making the now named Ash’s eyebrow twitch in clear annoyance at the jab.

“Excuse me a second.”

The black-haired boy whispered between his gritted teeth as he stood up, making his way toward the older boy, his cold and emotionless expression the complete opposite of what he showed till now, making them look like two different individuals.

The boy stopped before the older boy, accentuating their height difference as the young man was at least a dozen centimeters higher. But that didn't seem to intimidate the younger one, who glared fiercely.

“You forget who you are speaking to...”

The words were spoken like a silent threat, an intimidation Arche did not think the boy capable of. Even the other teens backed off the duo, anticipating a fight.

“I know perfectly who I am talking to... just a little-“

The young man did not managed to finish whatever he was about to say that the cerulean-eyed boy's arm darted and planted his hand between the older boy's legs gripping and twisting his... target as a wolfish sadistic smile made its way on his face as the older boy cried out in pain, doubling over in pain as the cerulean-eyed boy's grip did not relent in the slightest.

“I may have misheard you... who were you about to call a bitch?”

He continued to twist his hand much to the young man's pain. He barely managed to last a few more seconds before he finally gave up.

“Me... me...”

The pained cry only made the black-haired boy's smile grow.

“What? I can't hear you from down there... speak up! Will you?”

Arche did not have the words to describe the scene before her, it was kind of surreal seeing how the boy held the young man by his jewels... literally... and like he was used to it.

“ME! I AM THE BITCH!”

At those words the boy just gave the older guy a look of condescension before releasing his grip, making the older boy fall over in grunts of pain on the ground.

“And you better remember it this time.”

His raspy voice spat out before his eyes darted to the still ogling group.

“What do you lot have to look at?! You are an even number now, aren’t you?! Scram!”

His words were enough to make the others run away, before he turned and walked back to Arche and Rayne, sitting down as if nothing happened.

“My name is Ashryn by the way, you can call me Ash.”

His tone had returned to being almost meek, making Arche wonder if what she just witnessed was the result of a powerful illusion spell, but judging from Rayne’s pallor and his hands firmly placed over his crotch, she wasn’t the only one who had been hallucinating.

“R-Rayne, a pleasure.”

He barely managed to stutter out as an introduction.

“That is quite the interesting name.”

Ash said as he cupped his own cheek with his hand while looking at Rayne expecting for him to elaborate on his own name.

“Ah, it was my mother who chose it, I think it was due to the fact the day I was born it rained constantly.”

The magic caster explained a bit embarrassed. That was not something Arche knew. Her heart plummeted at the thought that

there were still things she didn't know about the boy, and the fact it had been this Ash to bring it up only made it worse in her book.

“That's an interesting naming practice, mine is quite less elaborate, Ashryn was just a name of one of my ancestors, it ran down in my family till me, it was also the name of the first Stormclaw.”

Ash explained as he bated his cerulean eyes at Rayne who averted his gaze.

Arche seriously wondered if she should just grab the green-eyed boy's face and give him a kiss, with tongue for good measure, to make this damn homewrecker back off.

“Ah, so you are related to the tribe's chief too?”

She asked, interrupting the two's discussion that was turning too much into flirting in her opinion. The older boy just looked at her as if this was the first time he realized she was there too, which irked her to no end. The boy waved his hand smugly as if trying to dismiss the fact as not impressive while still giving the impression it was very much so.

“The Stormclaw is my uncle, and the Head Hunter is my father... what can I say? Greatness runs in our veins.”

Arche refrained from scoffing at the not-so-well masqueraded boasting of the older boy.

“That is quite something, I can relate to the feeling, after all, my family has ruled the southeast of the empire since its foundation, we have been a steadfast pillar of the country, as the heiress, I feel the weight of such a legacy everyday... I am glad you will never know the burden of that role, since you are part of a cadet branch.”

Arche rebutted, emphasizing the heiress part, trying to not sound as smug as she felt inside. If this one wanted to flex her other's pedigree, she would find out Arche was not to be underestimated.

"Oh, that sounds interesting, how long has your family ruled the land... mine has been here for over three hundred years."

The boy did not back down, his slightly raspy voice rising in the slightest.

"That is quite impressive, but I guess managing this land comes with its challenges, a few hundreds are quite the number to feed during winter, I guess it is not too dissimilar from the hundreds of thousands living in my family's lands."

Arche met him head on, not backing down in the slightest.

"I guess that is impressive, how many wyverns are among those hundreds of thousands?"

Ash asked innocently even as her eyes conveyed everything but innocence.

"None, how many Troll invasions have you stopped?"

Arche got closer.

"None, how many dragons have you faced?"

Ash got into her face, cerulean eyes fixed into sky-blue ones.

"One actually, how many of your tribes are historical generals?"

Arche felt like she had the upper hand and finally would shut this arrogant prick up. Much to her dismay the boy never lost his smile, his eyes sparkling at the provocation.

"Jokes on you, we were the Royal Guard of Eryu--"

The boy shut his mouth by slamming a hand over it in seemingly panic, prompting both of them to separate, Arche in surprise and Ash in shock at something he was probably not supposed to say considering his next move was to stand up immediately after.

“I-I will see you later, Rayne!”

The black-haired boy stuttered out before leaving in a panic.

Silence descended between the remaining two casters before the imprudence of the common boy among the two took over.

“W-what the hell was that all about?”

He asked, clearly confused about what had just transpired. Though, Arche was too annoyed to give him a free pass for his denseness.

“It’s all your fault... idiot...”

She huffed before giving him her back to stare at.

“I literally did nothing!”

It was useless to say, the desperate protest of the boy was not enough to make her even slightly feel unjustified in her irritation.

{Kaelin’s P.O.V.}

The wyvern-rider waited in silence, keeping on carving the wooden figurine she had been working on for the last month under the vigilant eye of the tall blonde woman.

“You like what you see?”

She teased the older blonde without success as her flat expression did not vary a single millimeter.

“Lady Lakyus cannot handle her alcohol, you should have warned her.”

The woman said as her eyes darted for a moment from Kaelin knife to her charge who was currently sleeping it off under her sleeping bag, lightly snoring away.

Kaelin had to admit the girl looked rather cute like that. She never saw anyone with a hair color like hers, her tribe only consistent of black-haired individuals, but Lakyus? Her hair shined like the midday sun, she always thought those were only exaggerated stories but apparently it turned out to be a surprising revelations.

“How was I supposed to know that a cup of mulled wine would have that effect? I drank the stuff since I was eight, and even as a child I never had any problems...”

She grumbled under her breath, she didn't mean to get the girl drunk. She cursed as she felt her hand slip and slightly cut her thumb.

Without making a sound she simply placed her wooden half made figurine down and sucked her thumb trying to stop the bleeding.

“If you give me the knife I can get you some bandages.”

The stoic blonde woman offered. This one was paranoid, as if she would try and hurt someone just out of the blue... or did they think she held a grudge over her father's defeat? If anything she was envious of the girl's strength.

“That would be appreciated.”

She said offering her knife which the woman pocketed before leaving the tent.

Chance willed that that was the exact moment when Lakyus decided to stir awake. Yawning like a mountain lion who just woke up from a nice refreshing sleep.

“Water?”

Kaelin offered a cup with the named fluid inside. Lakyus’ brain seemingly had to take a few seconds to compute her words and where she was, and probably who she was too.

“Ah... thanks...”

She finally said as she accepted the cup, checking if it was water before gulping it down. Did she think Kaelin would prank her or something?

“Can I have some more?”

The blonde asked as the wyvern-rider just used her unharmed hand to spill more water into the cup.

“So, how do you feel?”

She asked once the blonde downed her second cup of water.

“Thirst aside, quite well honestly, my first hangover was way worst, I also drank way more that time though.”

That made Kaelin feel better.

“Mulled wine is usually watered down, so the quantity of wine is less than half the cup, sugar and berries are also used to sweeten the taste further... I was quite surprised you got so tipsy, no offense intended.”

She waved her hands around wincing at the unexpected sting of the wound on her thumb she had totally forgotten about for a moment. Something the younger girl did not miss.

“You are hurt... I should have a potion lying around... I often keep a few with me since I lost my healing spells.”

The blond visibly panicked as she rambled on as she rummaged through her sack, though Kaelin’s attention was already focused on one specific detail.

“There is no need, your friend has already gone to get some bandages, and using a potion for such an insignificant wound.”

She waved away the girl’s worries.

“Also, I am interested in what you just said... what do you mean, you lost your healing spells?”

The black-haired young woman questioned.

The blonde’s mood immediately changed, Kaelin never saw her sport such a dead-serious expression, not even when facing her father. Maybe she should have just minded her business and just ignored her slip of the tongue.

“When I first started my training, my goal was not only to become strong enough to protect those I cared for, but also capable of saving them, hence why I have started my studies in the divine magic field.”

Lakyus words were delivered emotionlessly, a strange contrast to her passionate self Kaelin had observed since the moment they met.

“As a citizen of Re-Estize I had easy access to the tomes related to the faith of the Four Gods... and so I studied, I was quite adept at it too, if I could say so myself, managing to reach the 2nd tier of healing magic in a mere two years.”

Kaelin could not help but feel her jaw fall slightly open at the admission. Her tribe might not have magic casters due to wyverns being already magical enough, but she was aware of the difficulty for natives to learn magic and how, the higher the tier, the more years you would need to dedicate to its study.

To just reach the 2nd tier in a matter of a couple years was quite unheard of as far as she knew. So she wondered how all this immense aptitude and natural gift went unused and why.

“I was a devout follower of the God of Water, preaching for the healing of the wounded and respect of life... or human life at least, since every other form of life was branded as little better than beasts with monstrous strength, good only to be slaughtered, and considered a plight upon humanity.”

Kaelin did not show any shock at the words of the girl who traded her stoicism for bitterness with every word she uttered. She knew the faith of the Four Gods was against demi-humans on principle, but to hear it from a follower, no, ex-follower, was another matter entirely. She knew of the danger demi-humans posed, but to just condemn every last one of them like this? Absolute nonsense!

“I imagine, you did not find their words agreeable.”

Kaelin attempted a joke that didn't seem to land as the gaze of the blonde darkened even further.

“Much to my shame... I found myself going along with it... then I met the Lizardmen and Zaryusu, the Quagoa and Riyuro, the Frost Dragons and Vulmitar... they were either desperate, fearful, or knew no better way to live... nothing like the inherently evil beings those holy texts described, otherwise we could have never become friends.”

The words were tinged with an hint of frustration, but also tranquil serenity at the same time. Kaelin's heart skipped a beat at that, she never heard anyone express such raw passion before.

“My faith in the Gods was greatly diminished by then, and with the last actions they committed back in Re-Estize, they made me ashamed of ever believing in them.”

Lakyus concluded her story, her tone was enough for Kaelin to know didn't wish to go into further details on that last straw. Still, she could not help but voice the doubt that surged into her mind midway through her story.

“This might sound like a foolish question, but why don't you believe in something else?”

She asked, curious to know the thoughts of the young adventurer on the matter.

“The only other religion I am aware of is the Six Gods of the Theocracy, and the Four are a derivation of them, I don't think I would find them agreeable to my worldviews... and they could also turn out to act as the Four did.”

That was not what she meant, but good to know that information, she had no idea the two faiths were linked, information were hard to come by in the Frostfang, even more if your tribe was aggressive toward any intruders.

“Isn't there anything else?”

She insisted, it seemed strange that this was all the passionate girl in front of her had as options.

“Well, I am not aware of religions from the Council State or the City State, and if you are referring to your Divines... no offense,

but I would rather not worship being who base their right to rule only on their power, that kind of goes against everything I believe in.”

‘This girl...’ Kaelin could not help but feel amused by the girl brazen words. She knew some of her tribe who might have taken offense at that remark, but it wasn’t necessarily wrong, so she saw no reason to protest her assessment.

“I don’t understand why you are fixating so much on religion though, can’t you just have faith in something or someone?”

The blonde girl looked at Kaelin as if she had just said pigs could fly. A good minute of silence passed before she opened her mouth again.

“But aren’t you supposed to believe is a god?”

The blonde’s question seemed far more directed at herself than Kaelin.

“And who said so? The same books that were wrong about everything else?”

At that, Lakyus seemed to consider her words quite seriously. But in Kaelin’s book there was nothing better than actual practice to prove a theory right or wrong.

The black-haired young woman offered her thumb, which by now had stopped bleeding.

“Go ahead.”

She said prompting the adventurer to frown in concentration, as if she was trying to focus on something specific. Kaelin was not going to lie, she looked adorable, like a young wyrm trying to take flight for the first time.

“Light healing.”

Nothing happened even as the blonde tried over and over.

“What are you imagining?”

Kaelin asked, curious to know if the girl had indeed shifted her focus from religion.

“My ideals... still, something feels wrong, as if I was trying to put a shattered mirror back together...”

The adventurer tried to explain herself, making Kaelin frown this time.

“Could it be that you are thinking about multiple things at once? Maybe you should focus on one thing specifically, after all that might be why everyone has to have faith in a specific god to begin with and not on the whole group.”

She tried to offer her own opinion on the matter, which seemed to meet the agreement of Lakys as she nodded.

“Okay, one thing... one individual...”

Kaelin watched as the blonde closed her eyes no longer frowning but still clearly focusing on something specific. She even saw a small smile spread on her face as her breathing stabilized.

“[Light Healing]”

A feeble green light illuminated the tent as Kaelin saw her wound close little by little leaving behind unblemished skin.

As the light died down and the blonde opened her eyes, she could not contain her enthusiasm as she bounced on the black-haired young woman, enveloping her in an embrace.

“THANK YOU KAELIN! I DID IT! I DID IT!”

Kaelin would have normally been dumbfounded by the sudden physical contact, but her mind was too shocked to feel embarrassed. No, as soon as the spell was completed something in her mind shifted, something that had been set in stone for years had just shifted slightly, not to the point of making a difference, but still... it changed.

She gulped, she did not dare to hope... not just to be disillusioned again... she could not take it... but if there was a chance, just a chance!

What she was about to do went against all her survival instincts, and even against her father's orders. But this Lakyus had opened her heart to her in just a couple days of them knowing each other. Some might call her naïve, but Kaelin preferred to consider her pure more than anything else, she was not foolish after all.

She gulped as she slowly pushed away the still jubilant adventurer who immediately blushed as she realized her actions.

“Sorry! Sorry! I didn't mean to! I was just too excited-“

“Lakyus.”

Kaelin interrupted the younger girl, sending her a serious look that shut her up.

“I am about to do something everyone would consider stupid, tell you something that should remain between us, not between me and your friends, just between you and me, can you promise me that?”

She saw how the girl hesitated for a moment before slowly nodding.

“Yes, I swear I will not reveal whatever you are about to say, but I warn you, if my group comes to harm due to this revelation and I am forced to reveal it to avoid it, you better not tell me in the first place.”

The blonde answered with honesty, much to Kaelin’s satisfaction. As she previously said, this girl was not naïve, she was just pure and positive.

The black-haired girl took a deep breath to calm her nerves.

“Lakyus, I have a Talent.”

The only reaction she received at her declaration was a raised eyebrow. The fact she did not find this information amazing spoke volumes of what kind of people she was used to surrounding herself with. But Kaelin was sure that, no matter how much she saw, her next words would not be so lightly received.

“My Talent allows me... to see the future.”

Silence ensued as Kaelin dropped the biggest secret of her tribe and the trump card they had come to rely on for the last decade.

As expected, Lakyus jaw fell open as her eyes widened to the size of plates.

“Ah?!”

A.N.

It’s confirmed! Kaelin is the Attack Titan! Lakyus has an alcoholism problem to deal with! And Rayne is either about to have a threesome or have really bad time!

Jokes aside, this chapter has been quite hard to write since it is mostly dialogue, which we needed after the action of the last two chapters, it was about time to set up a lot of things

fundamental for the progression of this arc and character development.

For those curious, mulled wine is very popular in the north of Italy, France, Austria, and Germany, I love having a cup of the stuff mid-morning after a few hours of skiing. The sweet Rayne received from Ash is a slightly altered version of an Italian northern sweet called Panforte.

As always, I am eager to hear your thoughts and theories on the chapter and hope you enjoyed the slightly longer than usual chapter!

Let me know with a comment / review!

Till next time! Stay safe!