

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

Status/written text

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Gate: Thus the Witch brought Doom There

Chapter 3: The Devil who entered the Garden of Roses

Miriël was just another lost soul, an orphan born as a prostitute's child, unwanted and unneeded her entire life. What other choice did she have but become a prostitute herself?

A life of misery was all she ever expected for herself, like her mother before her. Then, one day, just after a couple years since she began working, they came.

Seven Hands appeared from nowhere and everywhere at the same time, seizing control of businesses belonging to Eight Fingers, putting to the sword or hanging everyone who tried to resist.

Miriël was no fool, she had always survived by giving false smiles and moans to men she couldn't care less for. So, adapting to the new regime was no big deal for her... hell, it even turned out to be better in the long run. Places were cleaner, the most depraved clients were checked and even made to disappear if they caused too much trouble.

She was asked what she wanted to do next. She could have been delegated to other duties, cleaning, cooking, or any other mundane

activity a illiterate girl could perform... but she chose to stay, this was the only thing she was good at.

From there she was taught how to spy, how to lie, how to report. And she was damn good at it... men and women alike became little more than bubbling messes at her touch... the rush of vicious delight she felt at undoing them, and learning all of their little dirty secrets, was better than any form of sex she ever had in her life.

And now, after two years since her awakening to this new life, she found herself abducted in a foreign land by barbaric soldiers. Reduced to a slave for the pleasure of others.

Many would have despaired at her situation, but not Miriel, she was not just anyone, she had seen horrors that would have made this situation look like a common walk in a park.

Oh, she had been put up for sale after her abduction, she made sure to use all she learnt to end up with the richest looking person present. A shy look here, a nervous tremble there, she knew the type she was appealing to... those who would willingly buy slaves were just scum looking for a plaything to break and discard once they got bored. So, she made herself look meek and timid, unexperienced and pure. A first class bedslave if her natural youth and beauty was to be added.

And, oh, how they flocked to her... old and young, depraved scum that they were, they bid fortunes for her as more were attracted by the bidding war, their curiosity and pitiful masculine pride wishing to have what so many others were warring for.

She almost felt like smirking as some even tried to get violent when they were outbid. Truly, this was far too easy.

But then she had been picked, the quite dashing blonde man bought her, using his men to intimidate everyone else who tried to oppose him. In that moment she knew she hit the jackpot.

That well built man turned out to be none other than Crown Prince Zorzal of the Saderan Empire. She learnt, later on, that said empire was none other than the nation which attacked the Kingdom the day she was abducted. Poor fools thought they had won... she felt like laughing every time that foolish prince boasted about his and his empire's prowess.

They would all die, and she was going to make sure of that. They had put to the sword some of her friends when they invaded the establishment she was working in, people she had considered close friends or even older brothers, she will make sure that pitiful empire pays for what it did.

In the meantime, she just waited for Seven Hands to get in contact with her, she has so many reports to make... extracting secretive information from that foolish prince was so easy she almost felt bad... almost being the key word.

Those fools invaded Master Satoru's domain, she had only seen the man from afar, but if only a quarter of the myths circulating around that man were true... well, this empire was going to get fucked in less than a year.

But she wanted to do her part, to know she had a part, no matter how small, in the final capitulation of this worthless empire.

Miriël gently caressed the back of the rabbit demi-human currently sharing her bed. The poor thing's name was Tyuule, she was quite older than Miriël, but she could not help but feel some sort of older sister's protective instinct over the demi-human. For all the white haired girl tried to put up a tough act all the time, Miriël could easily recognize the fear and despair in the girl's eyes.

It took a few weeks before Miriel managed to convince Tyuule to tell her about her past. A truly tragic tale, not unlike many she had witnessed during her brief life, but the thought of sacrificing herself only to get backstabbed and blamed by her loved ones over lies your tormentor spew... well, that was another level of viciousness Miriel had fortunately not experienced in her life.

Ever since, she had always tried to entice the putrid prince in satisfying his lust with her, he seemed quite fond of her dark crimson hair after all. She wanted to spare the demi-human from the pain of having to suffer this piece of shit more than necessary.

It was just a matter of time, she told herself. She heard of how Master Satoru smashed this so called empire's army... Seven Hands were coming, and when they did... the only thing that will remain of this empire will be cinders and ashes.

{Italica}

{Pina's P.O.V.}

The princess of the Saderan Empire felt like bashing her head against a wall. How could they have come to this? Could nothing go right for once in her life?!

She and Hamilton had one job! Seduce the Doom and get him on their side... and what happened?! They got dressed up in see through nightgowns... reached his room... came inside... steeled their resolve... and when they were about to do the deed... they got interrupted by a bunch of children! And not any children! Two of them were his own apprentices, maybe even biological children! Another was an heir of an important house of their Senate! And the last one was the princess of the kingdom the were at war with!

They had remained for a couple hours standing there as the man, who just slaughtered a thousand man like it was nothing, told

bedtime stories to children! And as the cherry on top of this disastrous cake... she even got carried away by the story totally forgetting why she was there in the first place till the moment that devil of a man stopped due to the children having fallen asleep!

From that moment on she was just completely embarrassed and escaped the room while the man was busy tucking said children under the bedsheets.

And now here she was, the day after at the negotiation table, without anything to hold against the imminent takeover of the city. They had all rights to it, they defended a lost city, they had the power to hold it, hell, Satoru alone would have the power to hold it. And she could do nothing.

“I hope the night treated you well, countess, princess, after all that undesired excitement.”

The third princess of the Re-Estize Kingdom broke the silence.

The young girl was on par with countess Myui or maybe even younger, but the contrast between the two was like fire and ice. Countess Formal was a modest but naïve child still, she had some teaching on the running of the territory but did not possess the capabilities to do it alone. This princess on the other hand... only looking in her eyes unnerved Pina to no end, her manner of speech almost reminded her of her own father, Emperor Molt. But those eyes... there was something so wrong in the gaze the young girl was giving her, but Pina could not put her finger on what exactly that something was.

She mentally shook herself out of her train of thought.

“It has been pleasant enough, all considered.”

She responded as her mouth dried up completely.

“Now that pleasantries are out of the way, I think it is time to talk about the future of this city.”

The one who had been introduced the day before as Marquis Raeven quipped with a edge on his tone that did not allow for any rebuttal. Pina immediately noticed how the man clearly avoided the word discuss as, in their eyes, there was clearly no ground for a negotiation.

Their soldiers already filled the city, they had all but officially taken over. But she could not give up! The Formal's territory was the granary of the empire, the sheer number of deaths caused by starvation alone, if they lost it, would be incalculable.

“I was thinking the same, I have men to organize and a gate to rebuild, so let us make this brief and concise.”

The collected tone of the man who arrived the previous night, Marquis Pespea, agreed with his fellow noble's words while glancing at the huge, dark, and silent form of Satoru who was standing in one of the corners. The masked man remained silent as the Marquis gave him a dirty look.

“Be it as it may, as representative of the Re-Estize Kingdom in this campaign, acting as the King's voice in this matter... Countess Myui Formal, the Re-Estize Kingdom offers you this in exchange of your unconditional surrender of your lands.”

The young blonde princess spoke coldly as her eyes focused on the young countess. Pina wanted to protest, to say anything, but her throat was so dry she was unable to utter a single word in the face of the catastrophe unfolding before her eyes.

“King Rampossa III, as ruler of the Re-Estize Kingdom, offers Countess Myui Formal official recognition of her title, for her and her heirs, in the Re-Estize's court, her territory will remain

untouched in size. As a minor noble, she will be assigned under the jurisdiction of the nearest Great Noble, in case of acceptance, the countess will be expected to adapt to the new taxes imposed by the Re-Estize Kingdom as her territory would be annexed to our motherland... you can check all other details on taxation and expectations as a Re-Estize's noble here.”

The young princess explained as Pina felt her stomach get pummeled with every word spoken in that cold, professional, and almost uncaring tone.

“If you have any question do not hesitate to contact either me or Marquis Raeven, but... if you would heed any advices, I would suggest not testing the patience of those who hold your city.”

The words were spoken with a coldness that should not belong to a child of that age.

“Is that a threat, Your Highness?”

The head-maid of the Formal family asked sternly as she sent a glare that could set people on fire directly at the young princess.

“I think the princess was just offering an advice out of concern for the young Countess.”

Intervened Marquis Raeven with a disarming smile who tried to pacify the spirits.

“W-Wait! I-I think we should at l-least negotiate-“

Pina forced those words out of her mouth in a panic as she regained the ability to speak now that her worst fears were turning into reality.

“What is there to negotiate? Once the Countess signs those papers, this will officially become Re-Estize's territory... I would suggest

you and your men to flee before that happens, as the only reason stopping us from taking you as an hostage is the Kingdom's law under which no violent struggle may be initiated under the banner of negotiation... after the end of negotiation we will be allowed in full to take you and any other person of interest as prisoners of war, even more if found trespassing in the Re-Estize Kingdom's territory."

The princess continued to explain to an ever more panicking Pina. The crimson haired princess had never felt so utterly defeated in her entire life, she wanted to scream in frustration and denial... how could they have come to this? What did she do wrong? Could she have done something differently?

Before the empire's princess could do anything at all, the door slammed open as a blond man invaded the room.

"Sir Satoru!"

The man immediately went for the masked mage in the corner and bowed in front of him like a soldier to his liege.

"A group of riders just arrived at the northern gate, they say they are from some order from the Saderan Empire and are here to see the Imperial Princess, they... well, they are all women sir!"

In all response to the man's words, the mage just shifted his gaze from him to the princess in question.

"Friends of yours, your highness?"

He asked calmly as his dark tone sent shivers down Pina's spine. She could not even understand if his tone implied something more. Hell, since she met this man, he had been nothing but a constant contradiction.

When they met he seemed like a bastion of insurmountable calm and confidence, then she witnessed the true monster she heard about as he unleashed hell upon a thousand men with the same calm he used when he introduced himself, in that moment she truly feared what would become of her and her order in such a man's hands... and then... then she witnessed his gentleness and patience when he handled those four children, caring for them with the love of a parent.

She could not get a grasp on the intention or thoughts of such a man who seemed to act in all manner of ways without ever putting on an act, while still maintain his calmness no matter the situation. Pina wondered what would take for him to lose this constant part of his character... and what kind of man would he be if he lost it.

She was taken out of her reverence when Hamilton answered for her, bless her soul.

“It must be the Rose Knights! Princess Pina's personal order of knights.”

She explained with some nervousness Pina could not fault her for.

“Knights?”

Questioned the blonde girl seating next to the third princess, prompting said princess to shake her head slightly as if she had just resigned to the inevitable.

“Could I ask for a friendly spar?! It is so rare to meet female knights! I would really like to test myself against some of this land's best warriors! They must be if they were assigned as a royal guard!”

The girl asked as Pina tried to recall what her name was, though she came out blank as she only could remember she was a member of nobility.

“Lakyus, could you just... not? For like a few minutes? We were kind of in the middle of a negotiation.”

The blonde princess scowled at her apparent friend who shut her mouth probably comprehending her blunder.

“I-I think that could be arranged!”

Pina immediately intervened as a desperate plan hatched in her mind. They were slipping ever lower in the abyss and she could only cling to anything she was given, no matter how insignificant it may be.

They could not get captured here, nor could they just flee. They needed this mage, they needed this Satoru, by any means necessary.

“Now, now, if Lakyus wants to test herself against these knight, I don’t see anything wrong with that... I am most curious to know what this elite force is capable of... Rayne, Arche, I think you two should participate as well... it is time you get some practice on the battlefield, even if it is just a spar.”

Pina wondered where the mage was going with this. She did not expect him to intervene, even less be in favor of, this whim. He even pushed his, now nervous looking, apprentices to join in.

She might have misstep in her eagerness to find any foothold in the situation. Who knew what kind of thoughts were going through that unreadable man’s head right now. Who knew in which trap and danger she just put her friends.

“Well, at least we will have some entertainment while we wait for the countess’ decision.”

The young blonde princess relented as she apparently decided to go through with the mage’s plan, whatever it might be.

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

The masked caster looked down upon the courtyard with slight interest. His interested was due to the so called Rose Knights who were being brought up to current events by their princess. When he first heard the name, his mind immediately came back to one of Yggdrasil's most infamous mid tier bosses, the Rose Paladins, a group of plant heteromorphs with the paladin class and the unrelenting passive regeneration that made them a pain to fight alongside the many healing spells they had access through their Paladin class.

Of course, he did not believe this order would be anything like a group of level 60 bosses, but seeing how they were a royal guard he at least expected someone similar to Gazef or his men. To say he had been severely disappointed would be an understatement.

'They are just a bunch of girls playing knight...' he felt like facepalming at the sight of the girls, who could not possibly be over twenty, as they got into formation. They all apparently favored the sword, only the bulkier ones adding a small light shield on their arms.

His eyes darted to Lakys and his two so called students who just stood on the opposite side of the field. Satoru had no doubt about the result of this little spar, and he would gladly avoid what he now came to understand was a waste of time, but seeing how he previously endorsed Lakys' whims, he couldn't just turn and walk away, that would be in poor taste and might make the three children under his care sad. After all, they were all in that age range where they wanted adults to take them seriously.

"I told Lakys to not overdo it, that fool sometimes has no idea of her own strength, used as she is to battling the best of the best."

Said a seemingly exasperated Renner as she sat on a stool he conjured to allow her to see over the parapet and down below at the courtyard.

“I might have made a severe error by allowing Arche and Rayne to participate, I thought they would get some experience fighting experienced knights, but well... it seems like I have overestimate them.”

Satoru sighed. For all his status analysis magic did not work here, much to his annoyance, he still could easily see how simple it would be for one of his students to misuse a spell and risk killing one of them.

Oh, now they were looking at him, he gestured to his students to knock it down a notch by tapping his fingers on the edge of the parapet a couple times. Rayne smiled and gave him a thumbs up while Arche just nodded with her serious looking face she used every time she focused on something.

‘Well, I hope that will be enough’ he felt like letting out a sigh of relief even though that would be physically impossible.

As this silent exchange happened, the Imperial Princess climbed up the stairs to reach the rest of them on the balcony overseeing the courtyard. She was visibly stressed out and paler than usual. For all Satoru had no sympathies for this so-called empire, he still would not willfully aggravate the situation any further.

“Do not worry yourself princess, I instructed my students to restrain themselves from harming anyone.”

He said as he tried to reassure the crimson haired princess who just attempted to force a smile on her face in return.

“I am g-grateful for your consideration Lord Satoru.”

She thanked him as if every word she uttered costed her years of her life. He felt Renner lean on his side as she giggled at something that probably flew over his head. For all he tried to adapt to his new social position, he still had difficulties in understanding some social clues relegated to those who were born into privilege.

Be it as it may, he focused once more on the spar about to begin.

The older knight he saw often with the princess raised his arm as he gave a short speech on honorable conduct, or other things Satoru had little interest in, before officially starting the match with a shout.

Before the eight knights of the empire could even move a burst of flames and lightning rushed their way. They barely had the time to throw themselves on the ground as the elemental magic passed right above them.

In the meantime, Lakyus rushed toward the two holding the first line using her borrowed blade to disarm two of them before they could even understand what hit them.

As the knights barely escaped the next wave of spells sent at them, the first ones began to yield, followed by the disarmed ones now at the mercy of Lakyus. The blonde noble even switched to a normal blade for this spar as she feared the spellbound blade would harm her opponents.

‘WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY DOING?! I TOLD THEM TO KNOCK IT DOWN! NOT BOMBARD THEM!’ the undead shouted in his mind as his Emotional Suppression kicked in and calmed down his emotions.

“Umu, it seems like... it is already over.”

He said, not knowing exactly how to fix this blunder of his. Six of the eight knights laid defeated in less than a minute, as the only two

remaining standing tried to rush Lakyus only to be dodged and tripped by the younger girl's foot, causing them to lose their balance and crashing face first onto the ground.

Satoru felt the extreme need to teleport away or, at least, flee the scene as if he had just done something unforgivable. He immediately turned without a word, uncaring of Renner who had just climbed on his shoulder like a monkey.

He was met midway down the stairs by his pupils. Rayne sporting a feral grin while Arche giving him a satisfied and pompous smile.

“As you asked Master Satoru, we ended it as soon as possible.”

The excited boy chirped like a canary expecting praise for his actions.

“Even without Lakyus, they would have never even taken a step toward us.”

Huffed the young noble with pride filling her tone.

“Umu... good work... your coordination still needs work.”

He said as he ruffled both his students' hair much to their chagrin.

‘That was not at all what I meant before...’ he lamented inside as the two continued to beam in satisfaction at his praise.

{Alnus Hill}

{???

She could not believe it, she finally reached her destination, after so many weeks of travel, after so many sacrifices and risks... she finally reached her destination!

Walls of solid wood standing high and imposing all around what could be considered only a military camp. But she expected nothing less from those capable of slaying an ancient flame dragon.

The rumors circulating around the demons from another world were many. Many told her they were capable of calling forth magic even sorcerers of great renown would struggle with. Some others spoke of their armors capable of shattering steel and weapon capable of cutting through any armor effortlessly. They said how those demons rose from the pits of hell to punish the hubris of the empire and humanity.

But no rumor was as outlandish as those circulating around their leader. The Doom who came to Falmart, the Devil in Black, the Slayer of the Ancient Flame Dragon.

Many did not even want to utter his many monikers in fear of summoning him by mistake if he truly was a devil.

The being who single handedly was said to have brought low a legendary creature. Yes! That was the one she was searching for! The only hope for her people on the verge of extinction!

Even if payment she was carrying was not enough, even if she had to offer herself as a slave, she would carry out her mission and save her people. Even a cursed existence such as herself will manage to achieve something in this world!

As she closed in on the wooden walls a patrolling group of humans spotted her. They shouted at her to stop right where she stood, and she obliged as she patiently waited for the humans to get down from the walls and open the gate to reach her.

“Identify yourself and state your business in approaching this restricted area!”

One of the humans ordered as three other armed ones stood at attention behind him.

“My name is Yao Haa Dushi, I am a dark elf from the Schwarzt Forest, my clan is in dire need of help! I have come as an emissary to parlay with the Slayer of the Flame Dragon!”

She gave her explanation. The guards looked at each other with dubious expressions.

“I can prove I-“

She began to say as panic at the suspicion of not being taken seriously seeped through her mind. But a gesture from the human who addressed her earlier stopped her.

“It is not that I mistrust your words, the thing is... currently Marq-I mean, Commander Satoru is not present to parley.”

The man explained as she assumed this so called Commander Satoru was the man she was searching for.

“I see... still! Could I speak with the next in rank?”

She asked hopefully as the men gave each other another troubled look at her words.

“I apologize, two days ago Marquis Pespea left the camp, summoned by her Royal Highness the Third Princess herself, at the moment the highest in rank does not possess the authority to take any decisions regarding this matter.”

The man explained apologetically. Yao’s head fell, for each day she waited, more and more of her people got slaughtered. She truly was a cursed existence, even when it came to things like this.

“Could we ask you to uncover your face miss?”

The man asked again as she complied, she removed her heavy hood and travel cloak, revealing her face and body. Some of the men gulped, while other visibly averted her gaze, the youngest now sporting a heavy blush on his face.

“I never saw an elf before... they truly are as beautiful as the stories say...”

Thanks to her elven ears she heard one of the guards mutter those words under his breath. She could not remember the last time she received such a compliment, no one in her clan ever dared to approach her after the end of her last relationship that truly put the last nail in the coffin of her rumored curse.

“I mean no offense miss, but it would be best for you to camp outside of the walls, this is a military camp... but we can’t assure all will behave appropriately around you... I will make sure to relay your situation and words to the highest authority who will inform the Commander upon his return.”

The soldier offered as she realized that the flatter she was offered earlier was nothing more but part of her curse as well. She sighed, there was no point in defying her fate.

“I understand, you have my thanks.”

She accepted his words with all the grace she could muster as she prepared for a hopefully short camping session.

{Italica}

{Pina’s P.O.V.}

The crimson haired imperial princess held her head in her hands as she sat on the bed in the room she was sharing with the rest of her knights.

How could she have been so foolish? In her desperation for getting the mage Satoru's attention, she naively thought that he could impress him with her order's ability which had never been something to scoff at, no matter what others may say.

They were only three youngsters a little over half her order's age, she foolishly told herself. It was a shame those three had apparently been trained by the Doom himself, and it showed when her order was destroyed in both body and spirit.

She looked around as she was only met by downcast gazes from her childhood companions and friends. Most of them sported bandages around their arms or had visible scratches on various parts of their bodies.

Luckily no one was badly injured, though their pride had just suffered quite a beating.

'I instructed my students to restrain themselves' the words of the Devil in Black repeated on loop in her mind. If this was holding back, she did not want to see what those students of his could do when going all out.

She did not have the heart to share such thoughts with her subordinates, there was no point in pouring salt over the wound.

"Your Highness."

Bozes Co Palesti, her second in command, called for her attention, but whatever she was about to say was interrupted by a loud knock on the door.

Pina almost jumped in place. She had an idea of who it might be. After all, she expected the countess to have made a decision, and she had an idea what such a decision would entail for her and her empire.

She gulped and advanced to open the door. Though, it was not the face of the head-maid who greeted her on the other side. No, what greeted her was a large figure covered in black and wearing a mask hiding his face. A figure she had gotten to know quite well during those last days.

“Good evening princess, lady knights.”

The man greeted with his usual calm and deep voice that sent goosebumps down Pina’s spine every time.

“L-Lord Satoru.”

She could not help but slightly stutter as she stepped back out of instinct. Unfortunately for her, the man took her gesture as an invite to enter the room, which he took as he stepped in and closed the door behind him.

His large figure managed to be even more imposing now that he was inside a quite small room which was already pretty much filled up.

Pina forced her eyes away from the man and scanned her friends. As she expected they all sported expression that varied from mild worry to actual fear at the presence of the man.

“I must offer my apologies for the treatment these ladies had to endure at the childish whim of one of us... be assured that the young Lady Lakys had been reprimanded for her uncalled-for actions... I, myself, am at fault for my students’ reckless actions, so I came personally to offer an apology for them as well”

The mage said as he offered the princess and her knights a slight bow.

‘Eh?’ that was all the dumbstruck mind of the princess could come up with as her mind understood the man’s words.

Pina had no idea how she should react anymore. She could just not understand the existence before her. At one point he appeared as a cunning fox, at another as a gentle parental figure, then the next he was a demon who seemed to have no problems annihilate armies, only to turn around and offer them his humble apologies. Who was this Satoru?

Silence filled the room as Pina was unsure of what she should say or if she should say anything at all at this point.

“Umu, allow me to not offer solely empty words... After all, an apology is only one when the offender offers something to appease the offended.”

The mage continued as his gloved hand disappeared in a black portal like spell only to come out a few seconds later, now filled with glass vials containing a blueish substance.

The man gently moved around the room offering one to each of her knights who accepted them with some hesitation.

“These are healing potions, to my knowledge they are not something this world commonly uses, drinking them will restore your health and heal wounds to a certain degree... but seeing how no one was seriously harmed, you all should be as good as new once you consume them.”

Pina could hardly comprehend the words the unreadable man in front of her was saying. Anytime he said a word it seemed more absurd to the one coming before it... and the worst thing was, he had yet to be proven wrong once on any of his claims.

Her knights all looked hesitantly at the vials they were given. The first one to make a move was Bozes, one of the most courageous of her knights. She uncorked the glass vial and downed the content.

She tensed up as the vial almost escaped her grip before something unthinkable happened.

Pina blinked numerous times as she could not believe what her eyes were showing her, the bruises on Bozes' arms and face began to fade leaving behind unmarred healthy skin. The process itself hardly lasted more than ten seconds but by the end of it her knight seemed as unharmed as when she arrived.

Seeing the effects with their own eyes, all her knights proceeded to follow Bozes' example, some more eagerly some more hesitantly. In just under a minute all of her order's knights were as good as new, some of them even removing the bandages to discover their wounds were completely gone. She even heard one of the girls talk about a scar she got years ago being gone.

For the umpteen time since she met the man, Pina was lost for words, unknowing of how she should react when presented with the impossible.

“W-what are those? W-what kind of w-witchcraft is this?”

Questioned a shocked Hamilton as a deep chuckle answered her questions, bringing everyone's attention back to the giant mage who offered them this miraculous cure as if it was mere water.

“They are just healing potions the people of the kingdom can afford with a bit of saving up, I am glad they worked on you all as well... otherwise it would have been a shame...”

The mage known as Satoru uttered silencing the room. On her part Hamilton's face flushed as red as her princess' hair, the rest of her knights either following her example or looking away embarrassed by the mage's bold claim.

Even Pina could not help but feel a blush creep on her face. To be as bold as to address and complement their beauty in such a way was something she would have never expected the caster to do.

There was something almost taboo in doing it so shamelessly and the princess could not help but compare Satoru to one of the scoundrel knights she read about in her stories as a young maiden.

Well... at least he seemed interested in them if nothing else... she might just take this as a win, gods knew she needed one after what she experienced in the last days.

“Also, princess Renner, in the wake of the situation, courteously allowed you one day to rest regardless of the Countess’ decision, so you will not be captured as long as you leave before this deadline.”

He dropped that boulder on Pina’s shoulders as if he just commented about the weather and not the impending capture of a princess and various noble daughters.

“W-wait!”

Pina cried out before she could stop herself s she saw the man turn to leave the room. Satoru stopped in his tracks turning his mask in her direction. The princess, on the other hand, was panicking as she had no idea what she should say. She needed more time, if he really found them beautiful, there was still a chance for her father’s plan to work.

“M-may I ask a question?”

Panacfhe’s voice interrupted the tense silence a Pina felt like sighing in relief at her friend’s intervention.

“What is it?”

The Doom asked her still blushing friend as his attention left Pina and focused on the silver haired knight.

“A-are the two a-apprentices that fought against u-us... your children?”

The knight asked as her blush intensified. Pina felt conflicted on hugging her knight for managing to stall the retreating mage, and trying to strangle her for asking such a personal question that could alienate him further.

The princess looked on anxiously as the mage seemed to hesitate on answering. This was the first time she witnessed him even ponder anything as it seemed like he always had every possible answer ready.

“No, those two are just apprentices I have taken under my guidance... actually, they are my first apprentices...”

The man answered shocking everyone in the room. For such a legendary figure to only have had two apprentices... it was unheard of! Hundreds... no, thousands! Certainly asked him, did he just refuse them all? And what did these two possess that was so different from anyone else?

“Are they perhaps noble heirs?”

Asked Bozes as Pina realized that it may just be a simple matter of appearances. After all, many a noble family would benefit from simply having their heirs affiliated with someone as influential as Satoru. He might just have accepted the chore in exchange of something politically beneficial to him.

“Oh, well, Arche is a noble from the Baharuth Empire, a bordering country to Re-Estize and a rival since its foundation... Rayne is just a normal boy, son of a woodcarver I met when I arrived in Re-Estize

for the first time... I am afraid for every other information, you will have to ask them directly, their secrets are theirs to reveal.”

Satoru explained shattering the mental image forming in her mind. This didn't make any sense... taking in a noble from a rival country and a commoner? Was this not political suicide? What did he even think when he did this? What kind of unthinkable plan did he have in mind?

No, she should not dwell on this! She needed to focus on what was important right now! And that was to get to know the man she would have to seduce!

“L-Lord Satoru, I must really c-compliment your teaching skills then... those two w-were truly a menace on the battlefield... I guess you find p-pride in their achievements at such an early age.”

She tried to compliment the man, seeing how he would react when his ego was stroke. Would he take all the merit? Or would he accept the compliment without denying his student's participation?

“I think Arche and Rayne would be elated to know someone thinks so highly of them... I really can't take much of the merit, I have barely followed their growth for a year giving them pointers and access to information... everything else is the fruit of their own will and achievements.”

He said with his usual calm, almost disinterested, tone.

Pina felt shivers go down her spine, what even was this? ‘One year... one year... one year...’ those two word continued to repeat on loop as she thought back at her decade and a half of blood, sweat, and sacrifices... only to be completely and utterly crushed under the weight of two brats half their age with one year of training.

“M-may I inquire w-why such a powerful mage s-such as yourself did not have any p-previous apprentices?”

Inquired a shy Bozes who was still sporting a light blush from earlier.

“I apologize, I think you find me at a disadvantage lady...”

The masked man prompted the younger girl to introduce herself.

“Bozes! Bozes Co Palesti!”

She immediately stated as she stood straighter to symbolize the pride she found in her family name.

“Lady Bozes then... well, it is quite simple, I have always considered myself quite too young for instructing apprentices as I was still learning by the day... even now that I am twenty-nine, I still think I am a bit too young for teaching... I am still training to improve myself every day after all... how could I teach others when I am still far from my peak power?”

Those words uttered so casually caused a new explosion in the crimson haired princess’ head. ‘Twenty-nine...’ she would have never guessed, how could she have even known? The power he displayed was something that was already above any apostle the empire knew of. She expected him even to be various centuries old, that would have made sense for her... but no, he was less than a decade older than her... and he was sure he still was far from the peak of his potential.

How could such a being even exist?!

Her internal despair was interrupted when the door to her room was almost kicked off its hinges as a short but familiar figure marched inside the room.

Pina felt every muscle in her body go rigid as her eyes fell on none other than a smirking Rory Mercury.

“So you were here... you have done a fine job at avoiding me till now... you are such a brute in working me all up like that and then leaving me there... unsatisfied.”

She spoke directly to the mage as if Pina and her knights did not exist.

“Now come here and take responsibility... like a man.”

The apostle growled those last words as she jumped toward Satoru, only for him to disappear in thin air. Pina had to blink for a second as she thought her mind might have lost something there. But no matter how many times she did it, reality remained the same, the mage was gone as if he had never been there.

“Damn it... again...”

She heard the apostle mutter under her breath in clear frustration.

Pina just looked as the demi-god dusted off her dress before giving her a glance with her crimson blood eyes.

“You girls should back off from such men... delicate flowers such as yourself risk only to be plucked one by one, smelled, and thrown away...”

If anyone else said such words to Pina she would have given them a piece of her mind, but since it was the Apostle of Emroy, she could not do much else but inquire about her words.

“W-what do you mean, Your Holiness?”

The apostle answered her question with a deranged grin that put Pina on edge, as well as all of her knights.

“I saw it with my two own eyes, on that night... the unreachable pitch-black depths of that man’s... no, that being’s soul... a never ending darkness that swallowed everything around it... I heard the

chorus as millions of souls cried out in their agony in that bottomless well... for a moment I even felt the instinct of throwing myself down there as well, just only to find out if there was indeed a bottom to that endless spiral.”

The apostle continued to talk mostly to herself as Pina and the others could not possibly comprehend what she was talking about in that moment.

One thing was for sure, competition had never been higher.

{The next day}

{Renner's P.O.V.}

To say the third princess was annoyed would be an understatement. Her insides were burning, but not in passion like when her beloved cherished her, no, they were burning in pure rage.

And the focus of such rage was none other than the black-haired demi-god bitch she wanted so badly to hang by her own intestines to truly test her supposed immortality.

Not only that whore dared to touch and make advances to her beloved right in her face... no, she was so persistent in her pursuit that Satoru had to go out of his way and hide to avoid her. All of this culminating in him not tucking her into bed last night, or him patting her head, or setting her on his lap... or doing anything at all!

Renner wanted nothing more than to personally cut her into tiny little pieces to then see if she could put herself together only to suffer the same fate until she stayed dead.

As she was indulging in her daydream she was sporting a pleasant smile as she faked listening to whatever this little countess was saying, nothing more than a puppet dancing on strings not her own. The only important thing was for her to sign the papers and then

Renner would have all she needed to start phase three, or what she called an eye for an eye.

Finally, the little girl signed the papers Renner provided the day before. From now on the Saderan Empire was cut off from the lands that produced the 40% of their non imported food. Countess Myui Formal had become a recognized minor noble of Re-Estize under the area of influence of Marquis Satoru, not that anyone knew that small detail yet, and all was as it was supposed to be.

All apart from the presence of a certain crimson haired princess who was looking at the events unfolding with barely concealed dread.

Renner really didn't want to capture any of them. She knew what they were trying to do and having them around would only make the situation worse. The fact they were not as shameless as the little black whore, and the fact Satoru showed no interest, were the only reasons why they were still alive.

“Welcome to the Re-Estize's court Countess Formal, as soon as the conflict is over my father, the King, will certainly be interested in meeting you.”

Renner said gently maintaining her pleasant smile, she practiced countless times before, plastered on her face.

“Now... Princess Pina Co Lada, I thought we had made clear what your position was during the last meeting, may I inquire why you are insisting on being captured?”

The golden-haired princess continued addressing her fellow princess who just stood proudly at the side of the room and had not uttered a word the entire time.

“I am here to request a parley!”

The crimson haired princess requested much to Renner internal amusement.

“Her Highness the princess represents His Majesty the King, this parley can be arranged in just a few-“

Marquis Pespea began but was interrupted by the imperial princess.

“No, I need to address the King himself, as only him can finally put an end to this conflict!”

She continued as Renner lost her pleasant smile, resetting her facial muscles into their default position. Silence descended in the room. Renner did not like this turn of events, here her word was law, but once they returned to Re-Estize, she will be second to her father once more... and they all knew he did not have her same instincts when it came to this rather unpleasant side of ruling.

“I think that would be arrangeable.”

Renner’s eyes immediately darted toward Marquis Raeven as he calmly spoke those words.

‘Curse you Raeven, what are you trying to pull here?’ she thought as she tried to understand what the man could possibly achieve by going along with this farce. Apart from undermining her authority of course!

“Sir Satoru, would you be capable of returning us to the base at Alnus in the shortest possible time?”

Questioned the Marquis, already knowing what the answer would be as Satoru just limited himself to nod.

“We could leave right this instant if it would please the princess.”

He said as his gaze met Renner’s.

The third princess just accepted her situation and once again entrusted Satoru with this matter as he apparently had a plan of his own, considering how he put up on resistance to the Marquis' move.

Let it to her Satoru to counter what she could not in her limited position. That is why he was the only one she could ever love in the first place. They thought so alike she was convinced that if there really was a god, they created the two of them to be together. Two sides of the same coin.

“Let it be so Sir Satoru... Marquis Pespea, I leave the rest to you, organize a city guard and return to base when you feel the situation is safe for the moment.”

Renner instructed the southern Marquis who gave her a bow in acknowledgement of her authority and orders.

“Does your order wish to come too Princess Pina?”

Satoru asked the imperial princess who just seemed stunned at the sudden turn of events, as if she could not actually believe her request worked. ‘You are coming with us, I have no intention of getting my eyes off you’ Renner thought as she glanced at Raeven.

“Marquis Raeven, we will have need of an head figure for the Alnus base as long as Marquis Pespea is busy, so I am afraid you will have to come back with us.”

The Marquis just nodded to her words with a stoic expression that gave no insight on his internal emotions or thoughts.

“Lakyus, please recall Arche and Rayne.”

Requested Satoru as the blonde knight immediately moved to do as asked. The imperial princess making a similar request to her aide.

It didn't take long to assemble everyone in the room, Renner noticed how the blue haired female caster followed behind Satoru's apprentices, not that the princess much cared from what she did as long as she kept her distance from what was hers.

"Please stand closer to me, this spell is not designed to affect a vast radius."

The caster instructed as most seemed confused, curious, or excited at the prospect of what was about to happen. They all nonetheless closed around the caster creating a tight group that normally would have put Renner on edge, but since it gave her an excuse to hug her Satoru, she did not much mind in this case.

"Good... now [Mass Teleportation]"

The masked magic caster barely managed to say the words that the world around them changed abruptly. She didn't feel like she moved at all from her spot, but all of a sudden they were in the middle of the Alnus base with most of the people around them gaping at what probably had been their abrupt arrival.

It was almost like the world itself shifted and bent to accommodate Satoru's will. It was magnificent...

"Master Satoru! What kind of spell was that?! I had no idea there existed a higher form of Teleportation magic!"

She heard the excited voice of the young male apprentice cry out.

"It is certainly a 6th tier spell as Teleportation belongs to the 5th tier..."

Renner heard the other apprentice say with barely contained amazement.

“Indeed, a spell of the 6th tier that could turn out to be the difference between life and death for your group, so make sure you two learn it when the time comes.”

She heard the magic caster respond. Even though his tone remained as serious as always, Renner could not help but feel like the masked man was teasing his students, who rightfully retaliated with mumbled protests to his demands.

“I-is this r-really Alnus?”

Renner heard the crimson haired princess ask no one under her breath as her and her knights looked around them seemingly lost.

“H-how is this p-possible... we w-were in Italica a moment ago...”

One of the knights she did not care to remember the name of said with a dumbfounded expression that made her resemble a fish.

“Magic is quite the versatile tool, harness it in every of its forms, and you will hardly ever know defeat.”

Renner had no idea if Satoru’s words were meant as an answer to the girl’s words, or was just a lesson he wished to impart upon his eager students. It might have been both, she would not put it past him.

As the crowd of people dispersed from around Satoru one of the onlookers took some steps forward toward the black robed man.

“L-Master Satoru! Sir Mato has sent back word of his successful arrival as you instructed! Also, we are in need of your presence for a... unforeseen situation.”

The blonde man said as he gave a respectfully low bow to the magic caster.

“Marquis Raeven, you may begin to set the base in order, I will take care of this.”

Renner instructed as this was clearly a business regarding Satoru’s man. Raeven should know by now that messing with Seven Hands’ affairs would end poorly for him. She guessed that the feeling of a knife laying against one’s throat would be hard to forget.

“Certainly, your Highness.”

The words lacked the bitterness she was sure the man was feeling inside. He had always been an overachiever, that one, always trying to take in more than he could chew. If he stepped out of line again... she will make sure the knife would be buried deep in his throat this time.

“Ah... uhm... m-may I accompany you, L-Lord Satoru?”

Asked the crimson haired princess almost prompting Renner to grind her teeth in frustration.

“Umu... does this matter concern the empire?”

Asked Satoru as his subordinate shook his head.

“No, we have received an envoy from the Dark Elves hailing from a zone called the Schwarzt Forest... she seems in distress and has asked for a meeting with you Master Satoru.”

The man explained as Satoru brought a hand under his chin as if in deep thought.

“The Schwarzt Forest? In the Kingdom of Elbe?”

Questioned the imperial princess.

“You know the place your highness?”

Satoru asked seeing how the princess seemed to know more than he did on the matter.

“W-well, not directly... b-but I learnt about it a little when I studied the Saderan campaign against Elbe!”

She answered as she tried to appear more knowledgeable than she probably was.

“Your insight then may be useful, as long as your highness remains a listener, I think there would be no problem.”

Satoru shrugged his shoulders as if he really did not care about if the imperial princess followed him or not. And truly, apart from Renner’s personal bias, there was no reason to deny the princess’ request, she had no political leverage nor strength to use... she was literally in the middle of an enemy camp, ready to be captured at the first excuse she gives them.

She rendered herself powerless and at their mercy... all to get a chance to talk to her father in some sort of delusional belief it will change anything... the mindset of a doomed individual who had still to accept their situation.

“Shall we go then? I doubt Marquis Raeven will be able to arrange a meeting with my father in less than a few days.”

Renner said as she gestured for Satoru to pick her up, a request he obliged much to her satisfaction. There was nothing better than being carried around by her beloved.

She would just not waste any more of her thoughts on this stupid princess and her cronies. She was not worth it. Let her do as she wished, her Satoru would not fall for such shallow girls who only had their bodies on their side. Their attempts at getting Satoru to give them attention were pretty pathetic all considered.

“Show us to the meeting room, I will meet with this envoy.”

Satoru declared as the man began to guide them inside the base. The princess and her aide following right behind them. Satoru’s students seemed to hesitate before deciding to follow their teacher along with Lakys.

They all were escorted to the meeting room the Re-Estize’s nobility first used once they got an hold on the territory around this hill where they set up their base.

All found a seat, with the imperial princess and her aide staying on the sidelines compared to her and the others.

For all that little red-haired wannabe knight wanted to clearly get between Renner and her Satoru, she still had the decency to recognize their difference in allegiance.

They waited a little over ten minutes, all the while Satoru’s pupils continued to ask questions about the spell he used, before the door opened once again, as two of Seven Hands’ elites escorted in the room a third person.

Renner blinked but did not show any more signs of surprise unlike Lakys who was almost gawking at the figure. Renner never thought people with such a dark skin existed outside the inhuman races, though this one looked very much human to her apart from her clearly elongated ears and face. Her curiosity soon turned into annoyance as she noticed the buxom figure of the woman who was just escorted in.

It wasn’t like she didn’t have faith in Satoru’s character. The platonic relationship he had with Hilma had already showed her how much self-control the man had, no... this was more of a... personal annoyance on her part. Why did it seem like her Satoru was constantly surrounded by attractive women as of late?

{Yao's P.O.V.}

She was finally here, after days of travel and waiting, she was finally in front of the man who could be the only last hope for her people.

And her first impression... was kind of mixed. Oh, don't get her wrong, the Doom himself was as imposing and enigmatic as she imagined, like someone who goes around wielding power most thought reserved to the Gods. But... his company was not exactly what she expected given that they were for the most part all but children or barely women grown.

Yao would have made assumptions and demanded answer to appease her sense of justice. But this was one of the times, maybe the true first in her life, when she had to swallow up her internal feelings and actually pass over the possible abominable perversions this man may have.

Speaking of which, she had yet to hear him speak one word since she sat down as no one broke the silence. Taking a deep breath Yao decided that if no one would, she would be the one to speak first.

“My name is Yao Haa Dushi, I hail from the Schwarzt Forest, I have come seeking an audience with the man who is known all across the continent for his power and might, the one who was said to have slain an ancient Flame Dragon in single combat.”

No one answered her words prompting her to continue.

“Recently, my village and our forest has been hit by a calamity, two young Flame Dragons have awoken and declared our lands as their hunting grounds. We valiantly put up resistance but our numbers dwindle by the day and we risk complete annihilation... so, I beseech you, I beg of you, please save my people!”

She almost broke down as the painful memories of seeing her compatriots and childhood friends burning alive resurfaced with every word she voiced.

Silence descended over the room once more as her words did not seem to have moved the man she was trying to recruit. Not that she expected him to act out of the goodness of his heart, but she would have at least appreciated a reaction to the plight of their people.

“Satoru, you have to help them!”

To her surprise the one to speak first was one of the children by the mage’s side, a blonde human with green eyes who seemed to be the only one moved enough by her words.

“Peace Lakyus, we don’t have critical information on the situation and Satoru is the only one who has any right to decide on the matter.”

The slightly younger blonde girl next to the first one said as she placed a hand on the first blonde’s shoulder.

The dark robed mage moved for the first time from his position and produced out of nowhere a map that he proceeded to lay on the table for everyone to see.

“Where is your forest located?”

He spoke for the first time, his dark deep tone sending shivers down Yao’s spine. She never thought before this moment that a mere couple of words could cause such a reaction on someone that, like her, had lived for centuries.

She forced her attention back on the map displayed in front of her, it took her almost a minute, but she finally recognized some landmarks and managed to indicate her forest.

“Umu, a few hours of travel using [Fly]...”

She had no idea what the man was mumbling about to himself, but she did not much care as long as he accepted to help them.

“Satoru, that forest is in the Kingdom of Elbe... going there could cause an international incident...”

The youngest blonde child said as she studied the map for herself.

Yao was not one for politics, but even she could understand what that meant.

“W-wait! I am not begging for your help, I-I can give you the greatest treasure of our tribe as payment!”

She immediately said as she hurried to bring on the table the bag she was carrying the giant crystal in. as she revealed the gem she heard some of the present gasp in awe, but the reaction she was wishing for did not happen, the man behind the mask did not move a muscle at the reveal.

“Is this... a Sealing Crystal?”

Asked the mage in a seemingly curious tone as he went to pick up the giant gem.

“[Appraisal]”

He intoned some sort of spell as an azure aura flashed weakly around the gem for a mere second. Yao remained silent as she awaited the response, she could feel the tension weighting on her.

The masked mage slowly put the crystal-like gem back on the table.

“It is just a giant gem... it is worthless to me.”

Those words broke her soul in two. ‘Worthless... worthless. Worthless...’ she could only repeat that sentencing word in her mind over and over. Was her tribe so worthless to him that even their greatest treasure was too small a price for his help?

Her desperation reached its peak as she stood up abruptly uncaring about etiquette. She slammed her hands on the table’s top as she looked directly into the gems that acted as the mage’s mask eyes.

“Please! I beg of you! You can have me as a slave, but please, save my people!”

She cried out as she felt tears start gathering in her eyes. The mage did not even flinch at her outburst, simply staring at her.

“I despise slavery, please do not make such obscene proposal, even more in front of children.”

She felt like those cold words just ripped her body in two.

There was nothing she could do. There was nothing she could offer. It seemed like her curse finally caught up with her and decreed her doom as well as her tribe’s.

She fell back on her chair, staring at the floor. She did not know how much time she spent like that, but then her ears caught something, a sound, a voice.

“Male or female?”

She raised her gaze slowly as the words registered in her mind, she looked straight ahead at that cruel and cold mage that just asked that seemingly senseless question.

“Eh?”

That was all her brain could conjure out in that moment. She sounded pathetic, she knew, but she could not help it.

“The two dragons, are they male or female?”

He repeated the question, not that Yao could still make sense of it even after a second time.

“We don’t know.”

She answered truthfully even if she did not know the purpose of such inquiry, it wasn’t like she cared to understand it anyway.

“Dragons’ mating cycles happens very rarely due to their territorial nature... usually they have multiple offsprings as a result, and to manage the low mating ratio... there are usually at least a male and a female for each batch.”

The words were spoken by a blue haired girl she had noticed till that point due to her being hidden behind other children.

“Ahah... ahahah... AHAHAHAH!”

She heard the low rumble of a cruel laugh grow and grow, she could not help but shiver at the malicious sounding voice that belong to none other than the masked mage.

“MAGNIFICENT! Truly! If there is a male and female... I will finally have that dragon farm I have missed out on the last time!”

Yao hardly understood a word of what was said, and even most of the others seemed confused at the sudden emotional response of the one known as the Doom.

“Well then... now miss Yao... what can you tell me about these dragons... can they only use one element? Are they different in any way from an average Flame Dragon? I want to hear every detail...”

The dark elf had no idea what was happening. One moment she was despairing over her failure, the next that mage seemed elated at the

idea of helping them, and then he now calmed down and was asking about the dragons.

Yao Haa Dushi simply concluded that either she had gone mad, or the mage in front of her was madness incarnate.

For whom else but a Devil could find enjoyment in the hunting of dragons?

A.N.

Happy 4th anniversary for The Witch and the Sorcerer!

I can't believe it had already been this long! I won't say that it felt like yesterday, but it definitely felt like less than four years. So much stuff has changed in my life over this time, but this story remained a constant all the while!

Let me sincerely thank every last one of my readers, both those who chose to sustain my works on P-atreon and those who have remained only as casual readers!

I hope you have enjoyed the journey so far, and hope to see you all next year as well!

Have a fantastic day and stay safe!