

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hi everyone! Gotta say, weather has been crazy as of late. But nothing new aside from that. We are getting into what I think will be the most hectic part of the war and I am eager to write some of the things I have planned.

This chapter has been a bit complicated due to the emotional charge I wanted to give to some scenes and descriptions, I am satisfied with the result, but I, as always, await your judgment.

But without further ado, I wish you a good read!

Chapter 86: Of Victors and Vanquished

“Umu, that’s not good.”

Satoru lamented looking down from his position in the sky to the camp being set up on the ground.

The demi-humans were not meant to push west this much, they were all meant to go south and cause a ruckus in the southern Holy Kingdom.

But apparently this bunch, of what he believed to be Bafolk, had another plan.

‘How annoying...’ this time he limited the thought to his mind, not that anyone could hear him up there in the sky.

He really didn’t feel like going down there to deal with the problem, but he also had to keep his promise to Gazef and minimize the casualties among the people... and if the demi-humans kept at their pace, they would go through at least three more towns before reaching the capital.

He grumbled curses under his breath. He already had to deal with a bunch of fools while coming here and now this...

Really, life was unfair.

He glanced down, checking that the two girls were still where he left them. ever since they swore servitude to him, he had noticed how they were pretty close... in hindsight, it should have been expected since they were a triplet... anyway, he exploited that trait by making sure at least one of them was always by his side while the others were on a mission, at least they would know the consequences of crossing him.

He was not one to believe in blind servitude after all, even less one sworn so easily.

He guessed Nishikienrai would have loved them considering how fixated he was on the ninja playstyle. But anyway, they had proven quite useful so far, and if they kept this up he might have them act independently in the future... but that was a thought for another time.

Now he had a far more daunting task to take on.

He descended toward the ground and dispelled his invisibility, making the two twins visibly jump in place at his sudden appearance.

“I have need of your scouting services.”

He said, ignoring their reaction.

“I want to know how many demi-humans are there.”

He clarified his request.

“What about the hostages?”

The blue one asked... he should really memorize which of them was who before he messed up names.

“Take care of them, I don’t want anyone knowing of my involvement.”

He was pretty sure there weren’t many left. He had tailed this particular group for a while, and every night they feasted upon humans, so their numbers depleted quite quickly.

It’s not like they were feeding their livestock either, since if they dropped dead from hunger it made no difference for the demi-humans, so he was pretty sure that putting them out of their misery would be a mercy by now.

“There seem to be around a thousand...”

The red one intervened as if that number was meant to make a difference.

“Then we will kill a thousand... their corpses will fertilize the earth quite well, creatures who served destruction in life will serve creation in death, such is the cycle of life.”

He remembered Blue Planet saying something similar once.

He noticed the two of them looking at him strangely, as if they found his words odd or perplexing to say the least.

“Do a good enough job and I might have a few more sweets for you.”

He didn't miss the silent look of common understanding that passed between the two at his words.

He felt like shaking his head, they might be skilled assassins but they still were fourteen years old girls at heart apparently with all their weird adolescent priorities. But if sweets were a good enough motivator, who was he to complain?

Speaking of things he should not complain about, the news from Mato were quite wonderful, apparently that scroll he created using the skin of the White Dragon Lord managed to contain the 7th tier spell [Raging Whirlpool] successfully.

He should put up a mental note to try and see if he could put an 8th tier spell in it. Though, he would hate to waste a scroll considering the limited and extremely rare material. On a quick calculation he estimated that he had enough skin for 100 to 130 scrolls. Which might sound good, but not that good if he could only put up to 7th tier spells in them.

Still, it was a better result than the 5th tier he obtained from his other dragon corpse.

He sat down on a nearby rock. They could do nothing more than wait right now. He would rather act with the favor of night when his foe was gathered in one place, their bellies filled, and sleepy. Not that he thought anything could harm him there, but he would rather not deal with a bunch of demi-humans trying to run away and forcing him to give chase and waste time exterminating them.

“No cooking.”

He immediately stopped the two girls that were gathering wood and grass to start a fire and cook themselves some dinner. They immediately stopped in their tracks at his order.

“Smoke will give our position away... you are assassins, isn’t discretion among your job ethics?”

He asked no one in particular, almost exasperated at the blunder.

He could notice the twins’ cheeks heating up in apparent embarrassment.

“Usually, it is evil big sister who thinks about these things...”

The blue one said, glancing away with a blush.

“It is as Tia says, evil big sister takes cares of these things...”

The red one added, mimicking her sister’s gesture.

For all they were deadly assassins who didn’t give away much with their monotone tone, they were quite expressive with their bodies. Maybe that was due to the fact they were not supposed to be seen in the first place and so they weren’t trained on that?

He would have to ask them about it when he feels like it.

“I want meat though...”

He heard one of them mutter under her breath.

“An acquaintance of mine is a food enthusiast who tasted many a demi-human... she wrote down her notes and recipes here... you might find a good recipe for a goat-like demi-human.”

The masked undead said as he rummaged in his inventory before producing a book gifted to him by a certain half-elf.

The two blondes looked at the book with a disgusted expression as if he had just picked it up from a sewer.

“On second thought, I am no longer hungry...”

“Neither am I...”

Those immediate responses accompanied by their disturbed expressions elicited a chuckle out of him.

“Is that so?”

He mused, taking away the book that, in truth, did not contain any recipes to begin with.

Silence resumed as seconds passed by, soon becoming minutes.

“Is... is big sister okay?”

The question was barely a whisper but Satoru caught it nonetheless. If he wasn't undead, he might have felt something at the earnest tone she used to ask that question. But alas, for all he appreciated seeing some sibling love, he was untouched by it.

“Yes, she is doing fine, if everything goes well, the three of your will be reunited soon.”

He felt no need to lie. For all he didn't appreciate doing all this extra work, it was undeniable that the plan was proceeding as smoothly as it could.

He raised his gaze to the sky and the downing sun. All he could do now was wait, a silent countdown to the end of a thousand lives... and he still could not feel a thing.

{Ambassa}

{Gazef's P.O.V.}

The acrid scent of smoke hung thick in the air as Gazef Stronoff stepped over the splintered remains of a city gate. The once sturdy timbers, reinforced with steel and possibly enchantments, now lay in ruin, charred, broken, and utterly defeated, not unlike what it was meant to protect.

Beyond the gate stretched the conquered city: a sprawl of shattered stone, scorched rooftops, and streets slick with soot and blood.

His boots made no sound on the debris-strewn path. Not because he cared to be quiet, but because the city itself had fallen into an eerie quiet he didn't wish to disturb. The thunder of spells had ceased the night before. The last of the magical bombardment had ended in a flash of azure light that illuminated the black skies. Now, only the occasional crackle of dying fires and the groans of the wounded broke the silence.

Gazef wore his full armor, not out of need, but out of principle. The polished Treasures of the Kingdom, engraved with the royal crest, glinted dully beneath a grey sky veiled in ash. His crimson cloak stirred faintly in the breeze as he walked deeper into the city.

He passed what remained of the outer market first. He could imagine it, once a bustling center of trade, it was now a mosaic of overturned carts, collapsed canopies, and blackened corpses. A charred fruit stand lay against a stone wall, its wares long since reduced to cinders. Among the ashes, a small wooden toy poked out, a carved horse, miraculously spared by the flames.

Gazef knelt briefly, his armored hand brushing the toy. The sound of a child's laughter echoed faintly in his mind, unnerving if accompanied by the sight before him.

He clenched his jaw and stood, letting the toy lie where it had fallen. This was no place for sentiment or regrets.

Behind him, soldiers marched in small patrols, checking alleys and abandoned buildings for stragglers or survivors. Some bore grim expressions; others looked away, unwilling to meet the gaze of their commander as they passed. They had fought bravely. They had followed orders. But war, war had a special way of breaking a man and his soul. Even among his most trusted, he could see the tinge of pain in their gazes.

Ahead, the once majestic port loomed. Its tall engines and defense towers twisted like the limbs of fallen giants. And the ships in the harbor half-sunk or still smoldering.

The sea itself seemed wounded, its waves lapping against the docks with a sluggish motion as if they were made of oil and not water.

Gazef's path took him through a narrow street where the battle had been fiercest. Signs of magic were everywhere. Walls melted like wax, cobblestones cratered by lightning, air still charged with faint traces of power.

Here, the enemy had made their final stand, and here the death toll had been highest.

Even after suffering days of hell under the rain of spells, the Holy kingdom did not give up when Re-Estize finally made a move and invaded the city with its foot soldiers.

He and his had carved a bloody path through the streets against an enemy, that while still demoralized, was no closer to backing down or surrendering.

A low moan drifted from the rubble to his left, taking him out of his memories. He turned and approached the sound, finding a man pinned beneath a collapsed beam, his armor marking him as one of the city's defenders. Young, barely more than a boy. Blood stained his lips, and his eyes were wide with pain and fear.

Gazef crouched beside him.

"...Please..."

The young soldier, little more than a boy, whispered.

"I... don't want to die here... I want to go home..."

Gazef reached down and grasped the beam. With a grunt of effort, he lifted it just enough for two nearby healers to rush in. They looked to him for confirmation. He gave a sharp nod.

"See that he lives,"

He said, not trusting himself to say more than necessary.

They saluted and set to work. Gazef lingered only a moment longer, then turned and resumed his march. Mercy was part of war, too. And he would dread the day he forgot that.

As he approached the city center, the scale of destruction became even more stark. The main square, once a symbol of national pride, had become a graveyard. Statues lay shattered, their pieces strewn across flagstones like broken idols of abandoned gods. In the center, a fountain still trickled, though its water ran red.

Here, his vice-commander waited for him.

"Report."

He said without ceremony, stuck between the need of wanting to avert his gaze from the sight, and the duty of witnessing the result of what he had participated in.

Vice-commander Malvin, his second in command, stepped forward. His enchanted armor was clean, a clear contrast with the rest of his body and his eyes, heavy with exhaustion.

“Enemy resistance has ceased entirely, Captain. Civilian survivors are being gathered and treated. Looting is minimal, though there have been some... incidents. We’re handling them.”

Gazef’s gaze sharpened.

“No looting. No atrocities. We are not lawless bandits, we are soldiers representing Re-Estize... if they are from Seven Hands, tell them I will speak with Marquis Satoru directly.”

Malvin nodded to his words.

“Not to worry Captain, Seven Hands is actually helping us keep the order... the problems were caused by some of the forced conscripts who do not know any better.”

“Good.”

Gazef answered curtly. He looked past the general to the ruined cityscape, to the people, his own and theirs, sifting through the wreckage. Some searching for the dead, others for friends and family whose fate was unknown, and some other simply for something to hold onto.

“We won,”

Gazef said quietly, almost to himself.

But it didn’t feel like a victory.

He turned his eyes skyward. The clouds were finally breaking, letting weak sunlight spill across the city. It touched the highest towers, now cracked and leaning, but still standing.

Though, the light gave no warmth to his dread-filled heart.

He saw some of his warrior troop approach him, escorting a figure. An old man had been captured, thin and grey-bearded, his fine robes torn but still inkling to his previous station and nobility.

He was brought before Gazef, standing upright despite the ropes around his wrists, his old and hard gaze meeting the Warrior Captain's own without fear nor despair, only a deep and visceral hatred.

"You are the one they call the Warrior Captain? Wait, don't answer, your fancy armor tells me already."

The old man's disrespectful tone did not go unnoticed by the two soldiers escorting him, who glared at him fiercely but didn't move to retaliate.

"Cat got your tongue? Stay silent if you wish... see if I care."

The man continued, Gazef glancing at his soldiers for clarification.

"This is Lord Jeremiha, Captain, a minor lord and the Mayor of Ambassa."

The soldier explained, giving Gazef a reference to address the man.

"Lord Jeremiha, please stand down... there is no need for further violence, we will take care of the injured and the civilians will be safe."

All he received was a spit aimed at him from the old man. The saliva landed before Gazef's feet.

"Fuck your mercy, fuck your kingdom, and fuck you as well."

The old man growled in burning rage.

"You fuckers raped my city! My son and grandson died to you in the sea! My granddaughter was cut down protecting her home! You animals stabbed her to death! A girl of barely sixteen years of age! And now you expect me to bow my head and be grateful for your mercy?! You better cut off my head now! Because I swear, from this day onward, I will not stop until I have killed as many of you as I can before my old age or a blade takes me!"

Gazef took the hate-filled words head on, he could do nothing less than that, he owed it, to all those who have suffered and died.

"You're not my enemy anymore."

He said, his words sounded weak and unconvincing even to himself, but what else could he say in the wake of such hatred and pain?

"But you are mine... so get that block."

The words sounded heavy, even resigned, as if the raging fire from before was extinguished, and only cinders remained in the form of an old man tired of suffering and eager for the end.

Gazef had no need for words to understand what he had to do.

"Bring the block."

He ordered.

"But Captain, he is an important hostage--"

His subordinate was silenced by the Warrior Captain's stern look.

“I will take responsibility for this decision.”

That was the least he could do, the old man’s words were true, but they both knew he would never get to act on his threats, he would at best be imprisoned and used as a bargaining tool if anybody cared enough, or just left to rot if none did.

So, there was only one way out of this, and they both understood it.

The block, already marred with dried crimson stains, was placed in front of the old man as the two soldiers forced him down on it, not that he needed convincing.

Gazef unsheathed Razor Edge, the blade shining even with the day light poor as it was.

“I, the Warrior Captain of Re-Estize, Gazef Stronoff, acknowledge the resilience and unbendable spirit of Lord Jeremiha of Ambassa, and without any other options, sentence him to death, to be carried out here and now.”

The Warrior Captain proclaimed raising his blade.

“Any last words?”

He asked as protocol demanded.

“Perhaps... not all honor in this world is lost.”

Gazef downed his blade without replying. He had no need for praise, poor as it was, nor for the approval of his actions.

By now, he only wished for peace, however fleeting.

As the sun climbed higher, its light revealed more of the destruction. More of the pain. But it also revealed survivors

helping one another, soldiers binding wounds, children clinging to parents. Life, stubborn and enduring, rising from the ashes.

Gazef stood amidst it all, tall and unwavering.

Victory had been achieved. At great cost.

He would bear the weight of it, as he was always meant to do.

{Grass plain}

{Neia's P.O.V.}

Neia's hands trembled as she set the steaming platter before Buser, the Grand King of Destruction. The scent of the roasted human meat, seasoned and cooked to perfection, filled the air inside the dimly lit tent.

She barely noticed it anymore, the odor of death, the constant reminder of what she had become, but tonight, the scent seemed stronger than before. Her stomach twisted in protest, though she had long since learned to push such reactions away. Her training as a squire had prepared her for many things, but nothing had prepared her for this.

Buser, towering above her, cast a long shadow over the tent's floor, his bipedal goat-like form unsettling and monstrous. His thick fur was mottled with patches of various shades of grey, and his horns curved upward in a menacing arc. His eyes, amber and calculating, narrowed as he examined her, his food reserve, turned captive, turned servant.

And wasn't that an ironic, a squire meant to serve the paladins, the most honorable warriors in the continent, turned into a cupbearer, or whatever she was, for one of the most dreadful demi-humans existing in this world.

Neia couldn't even look him in the eyes. She had tried once, early on in her captivity, only to be met with a glare that had sent a sharp pang of terror through her. The Grand King of Destruction had devoured his enemies without hesitation, and she had no delusions about what he might do if he grew tired of her, and his amusement at seeing her skills as a servant turned into disinterest.

She had learned that her survival depended on just that simple fact. Buser enjoyed being served by someone who had once held the rank and etiquette of a squire.

The demi-human king, who had ransacked villages and slaughtered her comrades in the weeks before, had taken her prisoner. Instead of devouring her, as he had with others, he had ordered her to wait on him, as if she were no more than a servant.

For a time, she had been confused, unsure of the monster's strange fascination with her. But it was clear now: He reveled in the irony of a paladin's servant being reduced to this.

Neia's heart ached with shame. She had been raised to serve, to protect, to stand alongside the paladins she admired. She had known what it meant to fight for something noble, to be the hand that held the sword in defense of others. Now, she was little more than a slave, forced to bring forth the very thing she had once fought to prevent.

And to add to that, she had even given in to her hunger in the most disgusting and vile way possible. The demi-humans certainly did not transport food with them, apart from humans that is, and they also saw no need in feeding their cattle since, if any of them died of hunger, they just ate the fresh corpse.

After almost ten days of starving and being forced to see Buser eat every meal served by her, the demi-human saw fit to offer her a piece of meat, probably more due to his amusement rather than any type of compassion.

She had refused, of course, for all she was hungry and scared out of her wits, she would not stoop so low she would eat her own kind.

Well, the demi-human did not appreciate that, and he forced her mouth open and pushed the meat down her throat, forcing her to chew and swallow or suffocate.

The following days she had wondered if suffocating might have been the better option. Even her act of absolute cowardice in running away didn't see so shameful compared to all that happened after.

Buser grunted in satisfaction as he tore into the meat with monstrous efficiency, his fangs gnashing as he chewed. Neia flinched at the sound, her stomach lurching. The meat was from one of the captured soldiers, a young man she had once known. She couldn't bring herself to think about the person he had been, but every bite Buser took was another fragment of her soul dying. It wasn't just the horrors of the scene that made her wish to disappear, but also the shameful and completely deranged desire her empty stomach sent to her brain. The desire to feast on the food.

"You..."

Buser grunted between bites.

"...are quite different from the others."

Neia didn't respond. In this couple of weeks, she had learned that silence was the only answer that didn't provoke his wrath.

The Grand King of Destruction leaned back on his cushions, rubbing his belly in satisfaction.

"I find your presence... amusing."

He mused, his voice deep and gravelly.

"You were once a... what's it called again? Ah yes! A squire you said... a servant... how does it feel, little one? To go from serving a paladin to serving me?"

He chuckled, a sound that sent chills through her spine.

Neia gripped the edge of the table for support, but she didn't dare look at him. If she did, she would see his monstrous grin, that infernal satisfaction that only deepened her sense of degradation. Instead, she focused on the flickering light of the fire outside the tent, wishing for nothing more than to be far away, back in the days when she was just a girl eager for her father's love and mother's approval... before she... was turned into this.

"Answer me."

Buser demanded, his tone suddenly harsh.

"How does it feel to serve a King who devours his enemies? A King who enjoys the taste of your kind's flesh?"

She should have answered truthfully, shouted at him he was nothing more than a monster, and that she would rather die than serve him.

She might have done so once. Before she was... broken.

Neia's voice was small when she spoke, barely a whisper.

"I was taught that a squire serves their paladin with professionalism and absolute obedience... no matter the task."

She should just stab herself and die. Yes that sounded rather nice right now.

Buser's amber eyes gleamed with amusement.

"Professionalism."

He scoffed.

"What a quaint thing. How quaint indeed."

His gaze narrowed on her. For all he was a beast, she could not deny he was capable of eloquent speech.

"And yet, you serve me now, you serve me well."

He licked his lips, savoring the thought.

"Perhaps I will keep you longer than I had originally planned."

The words hit Neia like a blow to the chest. She had no illusions about Buser's intentions. His praise was nothing more than a twisted game, a way of toying with her before the inevitable end. But she knew, with a deep-seated dread, that the longer she stayed alive, the more she would be forced to participate in the horrors surrounding her, and the more of her humanity she will lose.

Each day, the soldiers of Buser's army would return from their raids, bringing with them more captives, more people to be slaughtered, more people to be consumed.

Neia's role, the only thing that kept her from being tossed onto the fire, was to serve these creatures. She prepared the meals, set the tables, and fetched their drinks. She was nothing but a servant

now, reduced to the very position she had once yearned for, just not under her desired master.

But Buser was not satisfied with just her obedience. He had taken to conversing with her, probing her thoughts in ways that made her skin crawl. Sometimes, she wondered if he sought to break her even further, to twist her mind until there was nothing left of the squire she had once been.

“You do know...”

Buser continued, his voice low and mocking.

“...that the world has changed. The days of humanity are at their sunset. Now, only the strong shall survive. And you, little squire, are still alive because I find your servitude... entertaining. Not because you are strong, not because you are useful in battle. You’ve been spared because you amuse me.”

Neia closed her eyes, trying to block out the sound of his voice. If strength was truly what defined who lived and who died, what even was the role of honor and justice in this world? Were those just fanciful words humanity invented to feel better about themselves?

Buser’s laughter rumbled through the tent.

“I see. your silence speaks a language all its own. But I think you’re beginning to understand, aren’t you? This is your world now, little squire. This is your life. It won’t be long before you forget what it was to serve a paladin. You will forget what it felt like to be human. You will forget everything except how to serve me.”

Neia didn’t respond. She couldn’t. It was all she had left, to remain silent, to endure. To what end, she didn’t know yet? But

she knew that if she abandoned even that last aimless hope, she would be lost forever.

Neia stared at the ground. Somewhere deep inside her, a flicker of resistance remained. It was small, fragile, but it was there. Perhaps one day, she would find the strength to act on it. But for now, all she could do was wait, and serve, and survive.

“Perhaps your silence is due to your hunger, some on, I will allow you to clean my plate with your tongues, like a good dog.”

The demi-humans pointed at his finished meal. Small bites of meat still clinging to the bones.

She wondered if her refusal would get her killed, or if getting killed was still better than obeying to begin with.

But before she could reach any conclusion, a cacophony of growls coming from outside interrupted the scene.

It wasn't unusual for the demi-humans to start brawls over food, but this was the loudest she heard yet. Buser didn't seem particularly affected and soon turned back toward her, but before anything more could happen, a loud booming sound risked deafening her, as if a thunder just landed few meters from her.

Neia covered her ears in pain at the unexpected sound and collapsed on her knees. On his part the demi-human king stood up abruptly, grabbing his blade and marching outside.

It took Neia a good minute, or even more, to regain control of her senses as she slowly dragged herself toward the entrance of the tent, peeking out like a scared child.

She could see the demi-humans in disarray, as they fled left and right, as if trying to escape an invisible foe, while from up on high

flashes of light, which she deduced were spells, rained down upon them.

Fire, ice, and thunder, mixed into an infernal blizzard, ripped apart anything in their wake indiscriminately.

It was almost unreal, as if Neia had just stumbled into the land of dreams and was witnessing something that could not happen in reality. She even pinched herself for good measure, only to wince at the pain.

She did not know how much the barrage lasted. What she knew, was that it stopped abruptly, leaving place to an eerie silence accompanied by the whimpers of the dying, and the heavy breaths of the survivors.

She heard harsh growls as many of the survivors glanced at the sky, prompting her to do the same. A droplet of darkness was falling from the sky, like a solitary tear, getting closer and closer to the ground, and becoming exponentially larger the more it approached.

By the time it touched the ground, Neia was able to distinguish its traits. The black gown flowing down his form like a mantel made of darkness. His shining azure eyes, unblinking from under his dark hood.

A magic caster she had been told to be on the lookout for at a different time and place.

For all she should have felt dread from the stories she had been told, this was no longer the time and place that would have elicited such emotions.

Too much had happened for her to acknowledge the words she heard as dreadful ones.

Now, all she could feel was a sense of awe... awe at the power wielded by one man alone.

A power that obliterated most of an army her own kingdom would have suffered terrible casualties to drive off.

Why? Why had they been so cursed to not have this man among them that day?

What madness compelled the kingdom to start a war against such a being in the first place?

“Ah! Finally the coward shows himself! You magic casters are all the same! You think yourself mighty when you are untouchable in the sky! But now, your magic is exhausted and I will-“

The roaring words of Buser were interrupted by a flash of light, the demi-human was sent flying, falling on his back like a giant sack of potatoes.

Neia could only stare completely paralyzed. What even was this? The demi-human who singlehandedly turned the tide of battle had been just put down by a magic caster who should have been exhausted after firing what could only be called a rain of spells.

“YOU!”

But apparently she was mistaken.

The Grand King of Destruction roared as he stumbled back on his feet.

“I AM BUSER! THE KING-“

Another flash of light, this time around the demi-human king froze over before falling forward.

Seeing the fate of their leader, the remaining demi-humans tried to scatter in all directions.

“[Widen Magic: Mass Hold Species]!”

A dark voice bellowed, rising above the panicked cries of the fleeing monsters.

And then everything stopped, as if time itself was frozen to immortalize that scene.

All the demi-humans she could see, and probably those she could not as well, stopped in their tracks, completely paralyzed.

Neia had no idea such a spell even existed. Was this not a power limited to the gods?

The cloaked being marched through the frozen demi-humans with an unsettling calm.

“Y-you... damn...”

Neia heard the rasping voice of the collapsed king. It was unthinkable for her that this had been the same being that tormented her and looked like the ultimate bastion of strength just a few minutes ago.

The implications of such actions was mind boggling. If someone like the Grand King of Destruction, who destroyed armies easily, could be brought low with such ease... then, what did it tell about the man who made such a monster look like nothing more than a cockroach to be squashed out of annoyance?

“You are still alive after two 5th tier spells? That equipment must be quite good... or you may be on par with the quagoa king in strength... either way, you should have stayed in your lane.”

The dark and deep tone of the man sent shivers down Neia's spine. The complete disinterest, if not for a slight curiosity, in his words seemed outlandish when his deed was something straight out of the tales regarding the Thirteen Heroes. And yet, he treated such matters with such frivolity, as if this was just another normal day for him.

Another flash of light blinded her, and this time, when the light died down, the upper body of the demi-human king was completely gone, symbolizing the end of one of this world's great powers.

"Master, we have done as asked, all the humans have been put out of their misery."

The one to speak was a girl that seemed to appear out of the masked caster's shadow. she was blonde, short, and seemingly around Neia's own age.

"Good, it would not do to let this go on more than it is needed to."

For all Neia shuddered at the words and knowledge that what remained of her comrade was gone. She could also not hide some tinge of appreciation for the man's actions. She had seen them, completely hopeless, ill, and resigned to a terrible death, at that point she thought that putting them out of their misery was more of a mercy than anything else.

"Now... kill the rest and let's be done with this."

The giant black figure commanded as a new blonde figure, much too similar to the first, emerged from his shadow. The two blondes moved quickly and efficiently, cutting open the throats of every frozen demi-human they came across with their daggers.

And it was in that moment that a realization dawned on Neia.

She didn't know what to do now.

She had seen all that happened as if she was a spectator of something that did not concern her, but only now the dreadful realization downed on her.

The young squire was in the eye of the storm, and it would take just a misstep for her to become another corpse among many.

What should she even do?

Ask for help? From whom was certainly her enemy?

But was he even an enemy anymore?

She had no intention of fighting for the Holy Kingdom, she just wanted to go home to her dad and forget any of this ever happened.

Unfortunately for her, the choice of how to proceed was taken from her when she tried to stumbled back from the entrance of the tent and knocked down the still half-full cup on the table.

Luckily, the cup did not break, and she initially thought the sound could have been masked among all the sound of the cradling fire still consuming some of the other tents outside.

Her hopes were shattered when a gloved hand flapped the tent open.

She froze over when her dark eyes met the two blue gems encased in the magic caster's mask, that she previously mistook for his eyes in the darkness of night.

The silence persisted between the two, as none of them moved an inch from their positions.

The stalemate was broken when the man raised his hand in what she interpreted as a salute.

“Thank you for saving my life!”

She bowed immediately as low as she could. Silence fell once more before she gathered the courage to raise her head once more. The magic caster still had his hand half raised, which he promptly retreated under her gaze.

‘Damn it, Neia! He was about to say something and you just had to interrupt! How stupid are you?!’ she berated herself harshly in her head.

“Umu... it was no problem, may I ask who you are, miss?”

His voice was completely different from his previous one. More laced with what seemed to be... uncertainty? Not something she expected from the man who just slaughtered an entire clan of demi-humans and one of the greatest threats to humanity singlehandedly.

The man inclined his head in confusion.

Damn it! She had waited too long to answer! This was no time to forget her basic lessons as a squire!

“Maybe you are hungry? You seem rather pale and... not well nourished.”

His tone almost sounded concerned, but that could not possibly be it. Why should such an existence, far greater than she could ever hope to be, even concern himself with her wellbeing? She wasn’t even one of his subjects!

“Here, this should help.”

Neia blinked as the cloaked caster offered her a brown slate of something. Not wanting to offend him, she grabbed it, her stomach grumbling as the sweet smell invaded her nostrils. Without being able to hold back, she tore into the brown slate. An explosion of sweetness invaded her mouth, eliciting an undignified moan from her.

She felt herself blushing to the root of her hair out of the embarrassment of such a display. And to make that even worse she felt some of the delicious treat around her lips, prompting her to immediately try and clean herself up the best she could.

And if that wasn't enough, she had just realized she didn't even answer his first question.

“Ah, uhm, apologies! This was very rude of me... to not even introduce myself after his Lordship asked... I am Neia Baraja, a squire!”

And so it was, that a broken squire met a masked caster into a demi-human tent, unknowing of the ripples such an encounter would produce in the future.

A.N.

And cut!

Eheheheh... we got some more young Neia, hope you liked her. I think some of you have been a little harsh on the poor girl last time. Remember she is in her early teens, without experience and facing the worst situations the New World has to offer, a think anyone would break under all that pressure.

On another note, Gazef is facing the consequences of his decisions and contributions to this war. I really liked how that

POV came out, hope you all felt the same desolation I tried to imprint in each scene and description.

Well, not really much else to say, Re-Estize has finally gained a foothold in the Holy Kingdom and said kingdom is at its wits end due to the demi-human invasion.

If you are wondering about Satoru's actions, don't worry, we are getting more insight in the next chapters. But feel free to speculate.

That said, I await eagerly your comments / reviews!

Stay safe! Till next time!