

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

We are back baby! Now stronger than ever! I just got rid of one of the worst workloads of the year and also finished this chapter on a high note, for once very much satisfied on how it came out as a first draft and so with little need to change things.

That aside, as always, I wish you a great read! See ya at the post-chapter note!

Chapter 85: Eyes of a Monster

Neia Baraja wanted to cry. She really, really, wanted to. But she knew she couldn't.

Here she was, at fourteen, in the middle of a platoon of hardened paladin veterans, newbie soldiers, and volunteers recruited along the way here.

Staring down a group of rampaging demi-humans who just carved a bloody path from the Wall till here, and that would reach the capital in a few days if not intercepted.

The growls of the monstrous beasts sent shivers down her spine.

What was she even doing here?

Why was a fourteen years old girl here?

Why did she choose to become a paladin?

This was so stupid!

This was the stupidest idea she ever had!

She didn't want to die!

No, she didn't want to be eaten!

She wanted her dad, she wanted to cry, she wanted to go home...

Vice-commander Gustav told her she wouldn't have to fight. She promised she would change her career and do something she enjoyed.

That moment seemed like it happened in a different world right now, as if that was but a dream. A time where war was on the horizon, but that was a war against men and not... whatever these monsters were.

A time when the world made sense, and they were not forced to march at a brutal pace without an explanation, only to find out they were about to face a demi-human invasion.

"Vice-commander..."

She whispered to herself. But no one answered her desperate and fearful call for help.

No, the vice-commander was far away, with the rest of the Paladin Order, facing the larger group of demi-humans.

She knew that this was how it was meant to be, and yet, she egoistically wanted someone to reassure her right now.

Well, that was probably what most people in her situation were wishing for too.

Theirs was not the only platoon left behind after all.

The demi-humans had never been a united force, there was a reason why the Wall was so undermanned seeing how they preferred to war against each other most of the time instead of coalizing against the kingdom. So, it was no surprise that even after they invaded, they still fractured, with various groups going pillaging their own way instead of marching alongside the majority. That was exactly why she, and many others, have been left behind to take care of the stragglers and minimizing the damage they could cause.

It made sense, it was a sound strategy to protect the kingdom.

That didn't change the fact she found herself on the frontline, staring down death itself.

“Shields higher!”

“Steady those spears! Don't leave any openings!”

She could hear the experienced captains shout orders left and right.

She had to trust them! Yes! She had to believe that everything would be fine! They were experienced after all! They could take care of a group of demi-humans!

She could hear the clanking sound of metal against metal as her short sword periodically scraped against her knee protections, a result of her shaking legs.

“They are moving!”

Those words chilled her to the bone and made her freeze over like a statue.

The group of demi-humans resembling bipedal goats was indeed moving, and if that was not bad enough, they were soon charging the platoon of humans.

“Prepare for impact!”

“Do not yield! Remember! If one of us falls, we all fall!”

Neia could barely understand the words being shouted as the monsters finally impacted with the line of shields and spears.

Like a wave of the sea impacted the rocky reef, the wave of demi-humans impacted the reef of metal, pushing the men and women back, forcing the second and third line of soldiers to push back to avoid the first line toppling over.

She had always heard that the strength of a demi-human was comparable to four humans, till now those were just numbers in her mind.... Only now that she was witnessing it with her own eyes, could she understand the horror of that simple statement.

The roars of the goat-like demi-humans were answered by the roars of the resisting humans holding up their shields like their life depended on it, as it probably was the case.

“Archers! Fire!”

“Shove those spears in their knees!”

Neia witnessed in horror the bloody battle ensuing just a few meters from her, and it was getting closer... ever closer.

Without understanding how and why, she found herself pushing against the back of the soldier before her as their line of shields was getting pushed back by the unrelenting demi-humans.

What else was she supposed to do?

She heard a gut-wrenching scream come from far too close to her.

The man holding the shield a couple lines in front of her had just been grabbed. The demi-human behind the wall of metal had managed to sneak his furred limb in between and grabbed the man's arm with his claws.

She stared in absolute fear. And much to her shame, her fear was not for the poor man and his fate, but for what would happen if he lost his grip on the shield.

Neia watched in terror as the arm of the man was ripped from his body, at the same time one of the paladins had managed to inflict the same punishment to the demi-human behind the shield, cutting off his furred arm.

By the time she focused again on the armless man, he was already gone and another man was holding the shield in his place.

She had no idea if the man had died on the spot or if he simply fell back and was bleeding out on the ground with no one to help him.

Much to her chagrin, she found herself uncaring, as long as someone held the shield, she would be safe and that was all that mattered.

She really hoped that it was her survival instinct talking right now and that she really wasn't such a scummy human being, otherwise she would never be able to look her father in the eyes.

If she ever saw him again to begin with.

She forced herself to discard the traitorous thought. If she had all this energy to think, she could certainly push harder!

The young squire had no idea how long the clash lasted, all she knew by now were screams of rage, fear, and pain, every second felt like an eternity of suspension as she was not sure her life would last till the following one.

And then it stopped. Or it would be better to say, subsided.

The deafening sound of battle grew weaker and weaker, leaving space to an eerie silence that for some reason unnerved her as much as the raging sounds of battle.

She carefully glanced around, like a gazelle who just escaped the fangs of a lion.

She could clearly see them, the human bodies torn apart by claws and teeth. She was grateful she did not throw up at the sight, she heard of it happening a lot among those unused to battle. But maybe she was just under too much shock and pressure for her body to react as it should.

Her gaze soon found another target, the bodies of the demi-humans. For all she had feared they could break through any moment, it was undeniable they went in without an ounce of caution, and the dozens of bodies lying dead, far more numerous than the human counterparts, attested to their lack of caution in their mad pursuit of slaughter.

“They are retreating! Steady! Steady! We cannot lower our guard now! Prepare to charge!”

Neia would have liked to do nothing more than demand if the commander was mad. Did he actually intend to send them against the retreating horde?

She knew, of course, that they could not let the demi-humans escape, this was the exact reason why they were left behind.

But, didn't he see what kind of monster they were? How did he expect anyone who wasn't completely mad to just charge such creatures?

Regardless of her thoughts on the matter, the platoon started advancing. Reluctant step after reluctant step, they moved forward, uncaring of the corpses around them, and in some cases even shoving them aside.

“Half!”

The group stopped as one. Neia silently questioned the strange order but soon understood something was up.

The demi-humans had turned around, and among their lines one individual stood out.

A huge goat demi-human with silver fur and curved horns, his emerald, green eyes shining like demonic flames as he gazed maliciously at them, his face curved into what Neia could only call a malicious smirk. With a shield on its left hand and a giant sword on his right one, he looked exactly like the kind of monster her mother would tell her about when she was younger and didn't want to go to bed. Only ten times more terrifying now that she had him before her.

The demi-human puffed out his chest, as if he was taking in a giant amount of air. His magical armor shining with gems under the sunlight.

“REJOICE HUMANS! FOR, ON THIS DAY, YOU HAVE EARNED THE HONOR OF FACING BUSER! THE GRAND KING OF DESTRUCTION HIMSELF! MY ALMIGHTY SELF WILL BE THE ONE TO GIVE YOU A DEATH WORTHY OF A TRUE WARRIOR!”

The declaration shook everyone to their core, from the volunteers to the veteran paladins. That was not a name uttered lightly, someone even Neia knew of. A powerful demi-human king who had been the bane of many a hero of the Holy Kingdom along the years.

The squire felt a warm liquid crawl down her legs, but she doubt someone would call her out on it or even notice her embarrassing state. Not when they were mere meters from a living nightmare.

With a roar worthy of a monster of his caliber, the demi-human king charged the line of shields, followed by the rest of his kind.

Neia had never been one for prayers, even in her upbringing as a squire and possible future paladin, she never spent much of her time studying the teachings of the Four Gods. But in that moment, with death charging at them, she offered a silent prayer to whoever may be listening.

The monster was every second closer to their first and last line of defense. His figure at least half a time larger than the average member of his kind, towering above any human she had ever known.

She gulped loudly.

Any second now.

Any second.

“[BRIEF SEAL]! [GRAND POWER STRIKE]!”

She heard the inhumane voice bellow before the sound of shattered metal echoed across the battlefield and half a dozen humans were sent flying through the sky in pieces.

It took her a second for Neia's brain to understand what she had just witnessed, but when she did... only a thought came to her mind.

'I am going to die!'

'I am going to die!'

'I am going to die!'

'I am going to die!'

'I am going to die!'

...

The demi-humans poured through the breach in the wall of shields that was just created by Buser.

And when the pained cries of men and women caught in the incoming slaughter began, Neia did something she never thought she would have done.

She turned around and fled.

Yes, she fled, like the coward she was.

She left everyone behind, hoping their lives would be enough to satisfy the demi-humans bloodthirsty nature.

No one tried to stop her, no one called for her, none that she heard at least. Hell, she saw even some copy her example.

She threw her short sword aside as it was hindering her ability to run and speed.

Only one thought remained.

'I must survive!'

And so she run, giving it all she had, she ran faster than the wind, leaving behind any dignity and honor she might have possessed, if she even possessed some to begin with.

She didn't know where she would go, she didn't even know in which direction she was running. All that mattered was getting away.

She could feel the breeze flow through her short hair, that fresh air representing freedom.

And then it all came tumbling down.

She felt her feet no longer touch the ground as if she had sprouted wings and started flying.

Unfortunately, reality was far crueler than that.

She glanced back and her eyes widened in fear at the sight of a demi-human she easily recognized.

“Eh, running after livestock is not exactly my thing... but with your kind, I can't really control myself.”

Those emerald-green eyes pierced her soul in that moment as a grin split his caprine visage.

Neia felt her stomach go on a freefall as she realized that this was the end.

No escape left.

No more running away.

It was all... useless...

‘Dad’

It was with that last thought, sent toward the only being who loved her unconditionally from her birth, that her body gave away all resistance and she completely blacked out.

{Ro-Lente}

{Hilma's P.O.V.}

“Do you never get tired of your job? I don't think going over reports over and over can be something interesting or fun.”

The scratching of Hilma's quill stopped at the question of the blonde caster.

“No, it is not fun, nor interesting for the most part... but it is still something that must be done... consider I also only get a final draft of the document as it has been already viewed and eventually modified two or three times by the time it gets in my hands.”

All she received in response was a grunt from the masked woman.

“I see... I am glad I will never have to do the same... I might just die inside.”

She recognized the inflection of her tone as a joking one.

“I bet you have never been important enough to receive such an honor then.”

She expected some kind of rebuttal to her provocation but the silence that ensued was charged with a tension she didn't expect.

She pondered if she should try and say something and ultimately decided to risk it. After all she had known Evileye for two years by now, and she was pretty good at reading others the more she was around them.

“You actually were in such a position once, weren’t you? I am sorry I brought up unpleasant memories.”

The lack of an answer to her question was all she needed to confirm her hypothesis. For all Evileye might have seemed very much an untalkative recluse, she had very specific patterns and body language that was easy to read once you understood it. Like a code of some sort.

The shorter blonde closed the books in her hands and set it aside, probably no longer in the mood for it.

“You stopped trying to probe me for information a long time ago... but I never understood why, I am quite sure you did not manage to read my mind or get the answer you sought.”

She shifted the subject, or at least that was what Hilma thought she was trying to do.

“I don’t see the point, Satoru and I can recognize a farce from a mile away, and you, for all your faults, like being a sore loser, have never lied or given reason to doubt your intentions.”

Hilma answered without hesitation, prompting the masked caster to snort either at the jab or the statement, or maybe both.

“And enlighten me, what are my intentions?”

The short blonde asked with all the skepticism she could muster in her tone.

“But, of course, to alleviate your loneliness, to finally find peace in this cruel world we all were born into.”

Her words made Evileye visibly flinch, as if an incandescent blade was just placed on her chest.

“You don’t know what you speak of.”

That sounded like an extremely weak response, Evileye herself didn't seem to be convinced of her own words.

“Now, I just praised your honesty, don't start lying to me now.”

The ex-prostitute kept calm as she moved from her desk to the sofa where the short blonde had just scurried over to make space for her. A clear, even if silent, sign of her consent for the woman's approach.

“I understand it is painful, I have battled with that my whole life, even if unknowingly, till I met Satoru.”

Hilma continued speaking from her heart. She had never realized how lonely her life was and how that loneliness was slowly destroying her from within. That is until she compared herself to the her of the past before meeting Satoru.

“So? Should I just let him heal me? Is that what you are trying to say?”

The masked caster muttered in what sounded like scorn toward the very concept.

Hilma just chuckled.

“Of course not, Satoru is not some healer or perfect being that can just make every problem of yours disappear, or else he would have become a divine caster instead of an arcane one.”

The joke didn't seem to land well, or at least Hilma could not see the facial expression of her interlocutor to judge the effect of her words. What was for sure was that now she had the shorter blonde's full attention.

“Judging by how much you praise him and are ready to go all along with his every whim, I might have thought otherwise.”

Hilma was not deterred by the clearly ironic tone of the 5th tier caster.

“Oh, trust me, Satoru has his own fair share of problems, he is very much a lonely being himself, it is just that in his case, he constantly covers it up by reminiscing about the old glorious days when he walked among friends... in that, at least, the two of you seem to be quite similar.”

Her words immediately caused the caster to avert her gaze and scoff.

“They were never my friends to begin with... otherwise they wouldn’t have-“

Evileye immediately stopped, probably realizing she said something she did not mean to say aloud.

Silence fell between the two before the shorter caster’s hand immediately darted toward Hilma, a magic circle just a centimeter from her face.

“Is this it?! Are you trying to get information from me by ruling me up?!”

The betrayal and anger filling the shorter woman’s tone were so uncharacteristic of her that Hilma almost flinched at the unexpected burst of emotions.

Hilma did not answer nor she tried to back away from the spell. No, instead her hand slowly reached for the gloved small hand pointed at her.

Even though the shorter caster didn’t stop her, she still flinched when Hilma’s hand linked with hers, their digits intertwining as Hilma noticed for the first time how cold Evileye’s hands were.

“I know it is hard to let yourself hope... only the gods know how much I didn’t want to risk in believing only to be betrayed, to scar your soul even further... but on those days we spent bickering, those moments we spent playing cards alongside Satoru, those duels you always end up losing... I could feel it, the three of us were having fun, like innocent kids who do not bear upon their back the scars of their past.”

The magic circle vanished in thin air as she felt the grip around her hand tighten as if the magic caster was holding herself over a endless abyss.

“Like kids you say... yes, maybe that is the right comparison... we are all still here masquerading like kids...”

Hilma did not utter a word, simply letting the woman beside her decide how she wanted to proceed.

“I want to believe it is real... that this is not just another lie... but... it is so hard.”

The violet-eyed woman could hear Evileye’s voice breaking as the persona she put up crumbled, piece after piece.

“It is fine, I won’t tell you what you have to do, that is a decision only you have the right to make... change cannot be forced from the outside, it comes from within, you need to decide for yourself.”

Hilma wrapped her arm around the smaller woman’s shoulders, her other hand still intertwined with Evileye’s in a grip she doubted she could escape.

They remained there, in the silence of a chill evening preannouncing the definitive end of summer, leaning on each other’s side.

“I... I want to believe in you... and Satoru... but, I don’t want you to hate me.”

The admission and the vulnerability in her tone made Hilma feel a pang of guilt at her actions, but she tried to not dwell on that right now, she was too close.

“I find it hard to believe anything you could tell me could make me hate you right now... I am still the acting leader of Seven Hands after all.”

She tried to lighten up the mood but with little success.

“Yes, you are, but this... this has little to do with criminal activities.”

The short caster continued as her free hand slowly moved upwards, right toward her mask.

Hilma tried to remain calm, to keep her breathing and heartbeat in check. She didn’t want to ruin it all at the last moment.

It was all quite anticlimactic. A second the mask was there, the following second the mask was lying on the ground, discarded, revealing pale porcelain skin beneath, a small nose and mouth like those of a girl still in the middle of her teens.

But the true breathtaking detail was only revealed when the now maskless caster raised her gaze to meet Hilma’s. those crimson pools she had for eyes pierced her like a lightning spell. Not only for their color, but for all they hid beneath, all those emotions Hilma had always tried to guess, they were all so readable now. Uncertainty, anxiety, even fear, it was all so... clear now.

Hilma felt her mouth grow dry. For once in her life, words eluded her. Her mind was running one mile at a time. If the coldness and

paleness were not already a dead giveaway, the eyes definitely confirmed that Evileye was an undead, and considering the low list of undead she knew of that could keep some of their skin, the first thing that came to her mind was...

“Are you... a vampire?”

She asked, her tone completely devoid of any kind of tone that could be perceived as antagonistic, or so she hoped.

Seeing how the now revealed undead just blinked at her as if she was confused or this was not the way she expected her to react, reassured Hilma she probably did not come across in a bad way.

“Yes...?”

The tone, so full of confusion and uncharacteristic of the usually collected caster, made Hilma break out in a giggle she tried to stop with her hand to no avail.

“Sorry! Sorry! I am not laughing at you... just... that tone... are you sure you know your own race?”

The older looking woman tried to apologize between giggles as a blush painted Evileye’s cheeks rosy.

“Of course, I am sure! I... I just didn’t expect that to be your reactions!”

She tried to justify her previous gaffe, averting her gaze and pouting, making her look more like a child than anything.

Silence fell once more as Hilma got her reaction under control and noticed that their hands never separated all the while.

“Well, that at least explain why your hand is ice cold.”

The vampire's eyes immediately widened at her words as her eyes darted at their linked hands, as if she had totally forgotten that fact. Evileye's hand immediately let go and retracted as if she had been burned by Hilma's contact.

"It is fine to want for some contact you know?"

Hilma said calmly, trying to not make a big deal out of the situation.

The magic caster did not respond for a few minutes, seemingly still contemplating where to go from here.

"You are a strange woman, Hilma... To not fear an undead like me, who has been around you so long and lied to you."

Her gloomy tone did not impact the taller blonde in the slightest.

'Oh, sweet summer child, if only you knew...' she thought ironically at those words.

"I really thought you were some kind of humanoid demi-human... but a vampire... that did not cross my mind... luckily for you, I enjoy being surprised."

And adding to that, it was kind of ironic that both the masked people in her life had turned out to be undead. She wondered what it said about her when she found more understanding and camaraderie among undead rather than the living.

"I don't get it... you should at least be scared! I am a monster!"

'Oh, that will not do' Hilma's gaze hardened at those self-deprecating words the vampire just spat out like venom.

She scurried closer to Evileye on the sofa, which in turn made the undead scur away from her. They repeated that farce until she was on the edge, and before the caster could make any moves to stand

and leave the room, Hilma grabbed her and pushed the teen-looking undead's head on her lap.

The fact Evileye did not oppose resistance to her gesture only emboldened Hilma who calmly threatened her finger through the caster's blonde locks.

“Who said you were a monster? Tell me, who lied to you?”

Hilma questioned as she felt her blood boil at the thought of someone being so cruel to such an already tormented soul.

“I am a vampire.”

Hilma barely managed to catch that as the words were mumbled under the caster's breath.

“And that is why you consider yourself a monster? Please... I met monsters, and trust me, their race was the last thing that made them such... tell me, did you ever kill someone for idiotic or petty reasons?”

She felt the vampire shake her head, answering negatively in her lap.

“Did you ever abuse someone because you could?”

Another negative.

“Did you ever ruin someone else's life for your convenience?”

Another shake of the head.

Hilma released an heavy sigh.

“You see, you are no monster then... you are far more innocent than even me.”

She assured the vampire.

“You cannot know that.”

The rebuttal made Hilma sigh internally as she kept threading her fingers through the vampire’s hair.

“Yes, I know that, you are a gentle soul Evileye... or whatever your true name is... for only a gentle soul could ever care so much for a child not even their own... or make sure whoever needed help around her received it... I don’t know for what reason you initially came here... but honestly, murder attempts aside, I am glad you did.”

She felt the small body of the vampire shudder in a familiar way Hilma easily recognized as crying.

Their eyes met, it was quite jarring to see someone cry without actual tears pouring out of their eyes, but the small smile the vampire had plastered on her face reassured Hilma her joke had landed well.

“Well... I am glad I have failed.”

Hilma returned the small smile at the rebuttal that was so much like the Evileye she had come to know in these last years.

“Also, your eyes actually looks quite beautiful... so I would suggest dropping the mask... at least around me, so I may have something good to look at... and also, it would not be fair, after all that is an unfair advantage when we are playing cards.”

The vampire’s blush returned with a vengeance as she averted her gaze. Now that she could look at her face, Hilma noticed how cute the short caster was when she got flustered.

“They were far better... before this happened to me.”

Again, Hilma barely managed to hear the mumbled words.

“Then you will have to tell me about it... when you wish to, of course.”

She did not receive an immediate answer as the vampire seemed to seclude herself in the depths of her mind once more, until...

“Hilma.”

The tone was more serious, more like the Evileye she had always known rather than this more open version she had just got access to.

Hilma stopped her ministrations, waiting for whatever the vampire wished to say.

“I want to tell you a secret... a big secret... probably the most guarded secret of this world... and it concerns Satoru as well as the rest of this world.”

For all the things Hilma expected, this was not one of them.

But she didn't object, after all, what was one more secret between friends?

{Renner's P.O.V.}

The blonde twelve years old turned in her bed. This was the third night she was unable to sleep.

She hated this. She hated this so much...

Curse them all to hell!

From that bastard of an emperor who thought himself a master manipulator, to the damned Holy Kingdom who just couldn't give up.

It was all their fault... all their fault her Satoru missed her birthday, and she was left alone... like she had been for the last forty-two days, fifteen hours, and thirty minutes.

To make things worse, even Lakyus was gone, on her quest to find some legendary sword or something like that.

Not that Renner didn't know her true motive behind leaving.

Even after Azerlisia, that girl was just too stubborn to admit her shortcomings...

But that was Lakyus for you. She had accepted it, the good and the bad.

What truly irked her was her missing Satoru... gone on a mission most would have considered suicidal.

She had faith in him, of course, she knew he would return to her. He promised as much under that same starred sky years ago.

But still, the lack of his presence was far too painful to bear.

Whoever came up with the saying that distance makes the heart grow fonder clearly had no idea what true love was.

For her heart did only grow colder and more detached by each day he was gone.

Only now she noticed that in all these years, she had never been separated from him for more than a week. And that happened only once due to her father's interference.

She thought she had gone past this by now. That the fire in her heart could carry her through the winter of his absence.

But she was wrong... so very wrong.

It all started almost unconsciously.

She started missing her meals, hunger just did not come to her anymore.

The warmth of the sun didn't feel the same on her skin.

The pleasure of a warm bath was no more, what remained was only a chore.

Even her perfect appearance didn't seem worth the time anymore since her love was no longer there to witness it.

Every activity became dull.

Even tormenting her brother felt more like a chore than anything.

And soon, before she realized it, she found herself spending her days on a chair, gazing toward the south-west, where her heart truly yearned to go.

A dull and empty existence all that remained of her.

Was this how she had lived for the first years of her life?

She was surprised she had survived it, for after just a month of this she felt like jumping down her balcony if it wasn't for the fact she was expecting her beloved's return.

To be completely honest, she remembered little of the period before Satoru. All seemed like a lump of random events in her mind.

The scorn in the gazes of her siblings, the absence of her parents, the murmurs of bastardy. It was all so dull and unremarkable compared to the wonders she experienced since she met Satoru in that faithful alleyway.

She threw her covers aside. She apparently would not get a good sleep this night either.

She made her way toward the mirror, icy blue eyes devoid of life staring back from her reflection.

She looked miserable even to herself.

The princess placed the crown, her beloved gifted her, on her head. If only to try and feel closer to his warmth once more. Still, it was wrong, she got out of her nightdress, something that wasn't gifted to her by her Satoru had no place on her body.

She stared at her figure for a moment, something she had done numerous times as of late seeing how she was finally hitting that grow spurt she had seen Lakys go through, and that she had desired for so long. Her baby face was slowly morphing in something more refined, and the rest of her body was following at a good pace even though she hoped to fill in more in certain areas, she still had time for that.

Renner moved toward her wardrobe, where she kept the only gown her beloved gifted her on her tenth birthday. The light blue dress matching her eyes perfectly. Not that anything he gifted her could ever be not perfect on her.

For all it was a light dress made to not impeach the movement of the wearer, it's true strength lied in the enchantments it possessed. The immunity of every spell of the 3rd tier and below was already nice enough, but adding to that, the gown was also capable of rendering her invisible for a fixed amount of time each day. A true sign of her beloved's care and love for her, not that she needed one to confirm his feelings for her.

She slipped on her perfectly white gloves, another gift she had graciously received from her Satoru. These ones were apparently capable of being used as effective shields against most

unenchanting blades and apparently increased her physical powers. Not that she had cause to use them yet.

She curtsied in front of the mirror which mimicked her gesture in its reflection. She left one of her true smiles slip at the perfect sight, after all that is what Satoru told her to do since the moment they first met.

She had to smile.

Now... now she looked just perfect, adorned with her love's gifts. She imagined herself standing by his side like this once everything was over... once the kingdom had finally been brought under her thumb.

Yes, she rather liked that vision.

She might just try to sleep again with that in mind, and with her beloved's gifts still on her, of course.

She just had to endure a little longer... just a little longer and this terrible nightmare would end.

Her icy blue eyes slowly closed as she plummeted in a world of dreams only a true monster like her could comprehend.

A.N.

Aww man... I was waiting for this chapter! Finally pushing a lot of stuff forward with characters.

Poor Neia is not having a good time.

Finally, we came to a point with Evileye and Hilma, not gonna lie, initially I did not plan for it to go this way, but the more I wrote their interactions, the more I liked what was coming out of it. Hope you all enjoyed some more emotional moments we have lacked for a while.

Renner is her usual top-tier Satoru glazer, truly she could fill a hall of fame by herself with how much she glazes the dude.

Don't worry, from next chapter we are coming back to the war itself and how it is proceeding.

Since some time had to pass anyway, I might as well just use it to make certain plotlines progress well.

I, as usual, am eager to read all your thoughts on the chapter and in particular what Evileye wants to reveal.

So, leave a comment / review and let me know your thoughts/predictions!

Stay safe! Till next time!