

These Tragic Souls and a Sword Reborn in an Intergalactic Space Opera

Story Starts

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Book 1 - The Empty Twin

Ch 3.4 Depersonalisation-Derealisation

[Part 4 of ?]

I woke up to the sight of my dangling feet against the backdrop of whiteness. Wiggling my toes, I was struck by a peculiar doubt as to their ownership.

Raising my hands to gaze at their delicate palms, the slender fingers, the soft white skin— or rather my slender fingers, my delicate, soft white skin. This certainty resonated with me as memories flowed into me...

No, the memories were already there, always present, yet for some reason, the sense of distinction that marked my hands and feet had eluded them. Focusing on a specific memory, one of those where I—she—wasn't able to avoid my—her—sister whilst visiting Shirou.

I—she—could see from my perspective how she was trying her best to make amends.

I could accept that as I love my sister.

She couldn't because she was her sister.

“Dear child.”

“Little one.”

Two voices suddenly echoed, rippled, and washed throughout my psyche, resonating deep within my very being. Yet, 'voices' would be wrong. These

weren't sounds picked up through hearing or processed by my mind; nor were they words merely planted directly into my consciousness.

What was conveyed to me was something utterly unprecedented, an experience I found impossible to articulate; my best description for this was communication at its most perfect form.

It conveyed everything—their feelings, their intent, their conveyed essence—wrapped within layers of context, leaving no doubt about what was articulated.

How I didn't notice it first was beyond me. My vision unfocused from my hands and feet, then refocused on what lay beyond, at the forefront of the vast, empty white space.

Did it just appear? Or was it always there? Was I only able to perceive it cause it acknowledged me?

I dropped my hands to gaze at a massive wall of flesh encompassing my vision. Before me, four colossal towers rose at the forefront of the white void.

Craning my head as I followed the tower, trying to peek at its peak. Somehow, I began backing away, or was the titanic structure shrinking?

The more it was revealed to me, the more my horror mounted as I realised what these grand forms of flesh—

Oof...

I suddenly bumped into something behind me.

Turning my head, my vision didn't focus on the reason for my abrupt halt, but on the scene unfolding behind me, where my mounting horror was proven correct.

From afar, I could see the white void blend into the cosmos as vast beings of eternity meandered about. These cosmic beings were an unintelligible amorphous mass, surrounded by a sea of willowy wisps of light. They were of such epic proportions that even the largest mountain would be closer to an ant's size in comparison. I watched as they wove between the bulbous, differently coloured, flickering wisps, inspecting each—for what purpose, I did not know.

Several of these beings, finding something of interest, would touch one of the flickering wisps. The amorphous mass would then shift into something anthropomorphic before they moved on to inspect the rest.

“...o....k..a”

I stared at this ritual for what felt like an eternity. Something muted came to consciousness, growing louder and louder, and I tried my hardest to break away from the sight of these cosmic beings.

“...o...ak..a”

“.....h..aka”

“Ms. Tohsaka.”

SNAP.

The fog within my consciousness suddenly cleared as the tantili—, NO! I resisted the urge to resume watching, for the allure of the spectacle beckoned me.

Turning my head towards the voice that snapped me away, I took extra care to minimise my acknowledgement of whatever was there.

I briefly acknowledged the old man wearing what looked like black militaristic robes.

“Little one.”

“Dear child.”

Again, I was called, though this time the ones who called me with those words of endearment were reversed; warm, welcoming, inviting, and encouraging, while the other, though mocking, sarcastic, and aloof, yet curiously inviting.

My focus suddenly redirected towards—

Blink. Blink. Blink.

HUH!? For another minute, my mind just couldn't keep up with the jarring things that I've encountered upon waking. One bizarre thing after another as I stared into a reflection of myself.

The current me was clad in a white dress that fell to my ankles. My reflection took on a slight golden-orange hue from the surface. I felt an unnerving chill as the surface blinked back at me; as I blinked back in return.

Realising that the golden-orange mirrored surface was an iris, as the pupil contracted, its eyelid narrowed, focusing on me.

Gazing upon the beings in front of me—or rather, their colossal faces, which encompassed my entire vision.

Two familiar faces.

My breath hitched, my chest tightened, as I felt another chill wash over me, tingling through my extremities. I performed a double-take as this time I locked eyes with a deep crimson iris. Their colossal faces—titanic, otherworldly, all-encompassing—bore my own visage, which I saw reflected through that

single, deep crimson eye.

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Opening my eyes—normally, I would have commented in my mind something related to the ceiling being more familiar than yesterday. It was a nod to my continued existence and that this, or rather I, wasn't just a delusion, dreamt by the original Sakura.

This time, the familiar ceiling was partly obscured by a tangled mess of black hair, disrupting the familiar routine of my awakening, accompanied by the inconsistent sounds of snoring to my right.

Sweeping away the majority of the hair from my face, I sharply blew out air as I picked out the last strands that were somehow caught within my mouth.

I removed the pillow on which I had been resting my head and positioned it on top of my stomach. This was a technique Shirou taught me the morning after 'the talk'. I gently moved the pillow towards my chest, rolling to my right. Gently backing away, I then effectively replaced myself with the pillow as Rin tightened her hold around it.

Peeking at the wall clock, parallel to the bed, I saw that I awoke about forty-five minutes before my toban, or rather my scheduled duty this morning. Still on my right side, I propped my head on my folded arms as I stared at my sister...my sister.

I could feel my cheeks flex, and a smile formed on my lips, as some of my doubts, which had been lingering since I woke up in this reality, were eased. Right after 'the talk', where I confessed everything to Illya, Rin and Shirou, Rin still made sure to make things clear with me.

She acknowledged that I may not be her sister, who was unintentionally abandoned, whether due to a lack of responsibility, unfortunate

circumstances, or misconstrued assumptions, but that night, Rin loudly declared that I was the third Tohsaka, her youngest sister and that she's happy to meet and get to know me better finally.

Of course, this was followed by her blushing and violently reacting to both Shirou and Illya's teasing and knowing smiles.

Looking at her face, her slightly open eyes, her open mouth as she continuously made weird sounds, saliva flowing down one corner of her mouth, the edge of the flow having started to dry up and begin to cake.

I gently brushed her hair with my hands as I tucked it behind her ear, resting my hand against her cheek as I gently stroked her soft skin. Involuntarily, she nuzzled her face against my touch.

"Baka, Shirou."

I smiled again at her antics while she slept. I sat up and reached for the blanket, pulling it up to her neck as I started to pandiculate, popping a few of my back joints, but I made sure not to let any noise escape, so as not to disturb my overworked sister.

Shuffling towards the foot of the bed as Cuspey, our assigned brownie, quietly popped in, brush in hand, ready to assist me with my daily morning routine as I summoned my black shadow.

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Quietly exiting my assigned room, taking extra care to rotate the doorknob so that the latching system wouldn't make any noise. Turning towards the direction of the kitchen, I could see the back of a tall figure with broad shoulders, who was currently slicing and dicing the ingredients for today's breakfast.

There wasn't any doubt as to who this was, as Shirou's increased towering form was quite distinct. The only others within this camp that were taller than our resident blacksmith were the recently awakened centaurs and merfolk, and the only other people from our group that came close to Shirou's 230 centimetres height were Rose and Gabrielle, with their respective heights of 227 and 217 centimetres.

To the left of Shirou was our resident grey-haired former hostess-waitress, who currently had her right cheek puffed as she pouted at Shirou. It was highly probable that Shirou was just teasing Syr, since Ryuu warned everyone not to let her anywhere near the cooking process, at least not near any process that involved seasoning or any form of heating the meal.

Typically, a scene like this would have caused a pang of anger, irritation, and jealousy from Sakura, but with me, the negative emotions of this body's previous host's possessive nature weren't present within me.

I don't really understand how I feel like I've both lived and not lived the life of Sakura Matou. I've lived through her life, through her eyes, but at the same time, it feels like I'm looking at it from a third-person perspective.

I think that, so far, Marin has the best perspective, or rather her summarisation of my situation, which resonates more with me. She simply compared it with a first-person role-playing video game. She even demonstrated it to me as she booted up one of her games on her PC.

Marin explained to me how she relates herself to the games she loves. She further emphasised how she sees herself as some of the characters within her games; she relates to them, feeling happy, sad, and angry whenever certain events happen to her character. She also says that she can develop genuine feelings for the character's potential love interests and even despise their enemies.

Even with all this, despite putting herself in the place of said fictional character, she doesn't feel any of her character's trauma or its associated emotional weight. There's a profound disconnect between her and the character, even while living vicariously through the various heroes and heroines within her favourite video games.

She further emphasised that, as Marin, she felt angry about the heroes' or heroines' trauma, but it was different from feeling it as if she had experienced it; she also emphasised the romantic love she felt for certain characters and how she imagines herself with said fictional character.

She then tried to compare it to my situation. The main difference was that her feelings for particular characters faded, and she would move on whenever she started a new game. In contrast, my experience was real with actual, non-fictional characters.

Unfortunately, most of Marin's favourite games are Ero-Hentai games, and most of them are quite explicit, so Marin's passionate and emphatic advice, paired with her concerned and sincere face was backdropped by a particular explicit scene where the princess of a just-pillaged kingdom, currently naked and gagged, was being passed around against her will by foreign invaders, to put it lightly.

Well, despite my confusion, my feelings and attraction for Shirou remain. As Marin explained, I lived vicariously through the tragic life of the heroine of the fifth Holy Grail War, Sakura Matou, and I, Sakura Tohsaka, will just need to sort everything else out in time, even my inherited feelings.

Moving towards the pair, I bumped hips with Shirou as I greeted them both, my tone questioning. "Good morning, Shirou, Syr?"

Well, I do not know which iteration of Shirou or Syr this is.

The morning after 'the talk,' both Rin and Hermione gathered everyone. They were planning on revealing to us the results of their multiple late nights, opening several chests lined with velvet—much to the consternation of everyone's raised eyebrows.

"Hey, we wanted to put on a show!" A clearly defensive Rin stomped her foot down in exclamation. Inside the boxes were more time-turners... a lot more time-turners.

"I'm still on my first cycle of the day, haven't used the time-turner yet," Syr stated.

"It's my third and final rotation with the time-turner today. I figured I'd help you a bit with breakfast and lunch preparations before I sleep the final hours of this last cycle," Shirou said as he awkwardly rubbed at the nape of his neck.

"Though, I also should probably correct my sleeping schedule to align with everyone before we start the raid or at least something close to it, as we still need to do rotating look-out duty."

I sighed as I exchanged glances with Syr, rolling our eyes at our friends who were notoriously oblivious to how self-destructive their overworking tendencies are.

Gently wresting the grip of the knife from Shirou's grasp, I placed it on top of the chopping board and forcefully turned Shirou towards the quarters area.

"Rest, if you want. Rin is about to wake. You can spend some time with her before you finally sleep." Pushing him towards my and Rin's room.

"Good night." He said to both of us as he obediently followed my advice, making sure to pin a brightly coloured badge with a large "4th" embossed at the centre on a board beside the door. Indicating that the 4th Shirou of this

day was inside the room, preventing any of his previous iterations from encountering him.

Looking back at Syr, who's also assigned toban today, just gloomily sighed.

"Well, despite working hard, at least they're getting some."

"Getting some? Getting some, what?"

Turning our heads towards the voice, the third girl assigned as toban today: Rose Potter.

"Oh, Rin is getting the bone of Shirou's sword this morning." Syr grumpily replied as she started laying out the stainless steel trays, heating up some pots of water, and putting on a kettle.

"Oh. Ohh... well good for her, I guess." Rose just said neutrally as her wand manifested within her hand. This was one of the more unique skills she gained from the transfer ritual with Zelretch, where she and her fellow witches soulbound their wands, amongst other items.

This allowed them to summon these items at any moment, and if ever these items were destroyed or broken, it would re-knit itself within their soul, ready to be re-summoned after a few moments.

Checking the clipboard for today's breakfast and lunch, she waved her wand, and with a swish and a flick, the knives began to animate as they started slicing, peeling, dicing, everything needed for today's meals.

Previously, the use of time-turners was limited, assigned only to a select few who truly needed to stretch their days. On top of that, according to Hermione, that was a quick fix, as the time-turners were only capable of doing two complete twenty-four-hour cycles a day, in which the number two, magically speaking with relations to anything temporal, was apparently volatile.

Some of the previous Time-Turner users even reported inconsistencies in how far back it moved them, missing the target by up to two hours.

Hence, they requested another raid on the twentieth floor, ordering its strip-mining for all possible blackstones.

“Sakura.”

Snapping out of my thoughts, I turned towards Rose and tilted my head in askance.

“I’ll concentrate on my preparations for lunch. Could you solo breakfast, or do you need Syr to help you?”

Turning my head towards Syr as she bit her lower lip, looking at me with sad puppy dog eyes. Raising my eyebrow at the now grinning Rose as she intentionally put me on the spot.

I sighed as I acquiesced to Rose’s trap. Both of us called for our respective assigned brownies: Cuspey and Dobby, as Syr cheered loudly and rushed to my side.

Cuspey, who was unfortunate enough to be subjected to Syr’s cooking, pinched the bridge of her nose at the incoming headache.

“This being bad, bad idea, Mistress Sakura.” Cuspey succinctly predicted the future as Syr stuck out her tongue at the corner of her mouth and threw us a peace sign.

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END

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