

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Wow, I honestly don't know what to say... 100 chapters in, and I am still very much into this, and eager to get to certain scenes I have been planning for a long time. That is quite the achievement when my only other long story to date is a poorly written 60k crossover... but well, I would not be here without that cringe fic, so I think it at least deserves the smallest amount of respect.

But I am rambling now. I just want to thank everyone who supported me so far, for you see, you all are the reason this story is still going strong, and I can dedicate so much time to it even when adult responsibilities seem to take over my life. So thank you, from those who have been just reading, to those who have been reviewing, and especially to those who have decided to sustain my work and believe in me.

I truly cannot express how grateful I am from the bottom of my heart, words good enough do not exist.

And without further ado, I hope you enjoy the read as this is one of those chapters that have been long coming. And it is all for our dear salaryman, turned undead, turned marquis, turned father? Or something like that...

Chapter 100: Suzuki Satoru, the Castaway

The alarm blasted through the dark room, followed by a grunt of displeasure as a hand darted out from under the covers to shut down the infernal device. Even in the ensuing silence, the occupant of the bed turned and twisted under the covers for a few more minutes.

With a final turn, two small feet and legs emerged from under the covers and planted themselves on the floor, only for them to dart back up followed by a childish whine.

“Cold...”

The black haired child mumbled sleepily as he rubbed his eyes. He blinked a few more times before his eyes finally adapted to the dim light and managed to focus on the familiar room around him.

His open wardrobe with his uniform still hanging out. He had no idea why they had to wear that even when most of their lessons were on their holo-screen. What did it matter how they looked in their rooms?

The acid and poisonous rains have been too heavy as of late for anyone to go out safely. It happened when winter came around and the intense heat left place to the freezing winter. It was wild to think that at one point the change of temperature had been more gradual then the one week it took right now to pass from scolding hot to freezing cold.

He had always wondered how different the world had been not even a century ago. Honestly, if it wasn't for their teacher showing them a photo, he would have never believed the sky had been blur at some point.

The boy finally jumped down from his bed and walked out of his room, following his daily routine with more diligence than usual... after all, today was his birthday!

He felt a bit of excitement begin to build up as he brushed his teeth and the haziness of sleep began to dissipate.

Once done, he came back to his room to down his uniform, he even combed his hair like his mother liked it, even though he always found it the most annoying part of getting ready. He just didn't like having stuff pass between his hair.

After a final look in the small mirror he had in his room to check everything was as it should be. He moved back into the short corridor, directed toward the kitchen from where a delicious aroma was calling for him and his tastebuds.

His eyes immediately darted toward the plate on the kitchen counter. Its golden content making his eyes light up and his mouth salivate at the mere sight.

But something was wrong. His mother always made sure to be there in the morning to wish him a happy birthday. It wasn't uncommon for her to leave earlier than he woke up on any other day... but not on his birthday.

Well, he was bummed out but he guessed he could ask later.

He moved around the counter to reach a chair when he felt his foot step on something that clearly wasn't the floor, which caused him to lose his footing and fall forward, only managing to shield himself from the fall by using his arms.

“Ouch.”

He squeaked out as he felt the pain of his fall concentrate on his arms, hopefully nothing was really hurt and the pain would just dull in due time.

He slowly rolled over and moved into a seated position on the floor, curious to know if his mom left something on the floor before leaving, it would certainly give credence to his hypothesis of her being on a rush, as he knew his mother was extremely tidy and would never leave something just splayed there.

His eyes found the offending object that made him trip without much difficulty, only for him to freeze a moment later.

“Mom?”

He felt the word leave his lips without he meaning to say it. for there, splayed on the ground like a used rag, was none other than his own mother.

Silence remained the only answer to his call.

He had no idea how long he remained there, just looking. Seconds, minutes, or hours seemed to have lost all meaning in his head at that moment.

He slowly crawled on all fours, like a baby, toward the still form of his mother.

The lump in his throat blocking him from making any sounds.

Her cheek was pressed against the floor. One of her black eyes he inherited was open only halfway, fixed on nothing he could see. Her mouth hung crooked, wet at the corner. With a trembling hand, he touched her shoulder and felt the strange warmth through her sweater, neither cold nor hot. Just wrong. Wrong in a way an eleven years old boy could not explain with his vocabulary.

“M-mom...”

He felt the lump in his throat barely move just to let him utter that whispered and desperate call toward the only other living being that ever showed him love.

He nudged her again, because adults were not supposed sleep on the floor, and his mother needed to wake up if she didn't want to be late for work.

Her head shifted with the movement, dragging against the floor with a faint sound that made his stomach tighten.

He waited.

Nothing.

The room no longer smelled with the same aroma that tempted him earlier. The sweet and creamy smell of his favorite dish, that reminded him of home and comforted him so many times in the past... only made him want to wretch right now.

His roaming and unfocussed gaze finally settled on her hand. Two fingers twitched faintly, or maybe it was only his mind seeing things that weren't there.

He sat beside her for a while after that, rubbing his eyes, listening to the silence of an apartment devoid of life. His mind tried to make everything make sense again, no matter how absurd the explanation.

Maybe she was angry with him. Or sick. Or pretending.

When his own small hand instinctively tried to clench hers to try and help her up, it felt heavier than he expected.

He tried some more after that, to no avail.

His mother remained on the floor like a doll whose strings were cut.

Not being able to look at her pale visage anymore, his eyes tried to find anything else to stare at, ending up on the dish that by now certainly cooled down.

He used the hand not being linked to his mother's to gently scoop up some of the dish, bringing it to his lips instinctively, hoping to feel anything... anything that wasn't this emptiness he could not explain.

He chewed on the soft texture of the cooked eggs, swirling his tongue to feel the sweet taste he remembered. Only to have the half chewed bite escape his mouth and splatter on the floor. Salty tears flowing down his cheeks as he continued to observe the food he had woken up looking forward to.

...

It tasted like ash.

...

...

...

Satoru's eyes opened as he felt a change in the air of his room.

Undead could not sleep and consequently could not dream. That was the truth of his new body. But he had learnt an interesting trick from Evileye. Apparently, undead could still fall in some kind of trance by isolating their senses and focusing on a specific memory. It took him a while to get the hang of it, but he had managed to do it at some point.

Of course, what he was witnessing were his own memories, with its own blank spots, which meant his mind had to made up stuff in order to fill in those blanks, and he never knew how much of what he recalled were genuine memories and how much just his mind trying to plug in holes.

It was indeed an interesting form of self-hypnosis unique to undead, but he was not really interested in experimenting with it. He had too much going on in the present to spend so much time focusing on the past. But today was a special day, hence why he decided to revisit the memories of that morning from twenty years ago.

A painful memory it was, and one he dreaded revisiting. He remembered hazily someone coming to retrieve his mother's corpse, and the fact he had been assigned a state-appointed tutor that he only met once when introduced and once when she was dismissed when he turned 12 and entered the work-force. The only reason he survived till the end of elementary school was due to his mother's savings, which in hindsight were probably meant as his tuition for entering middle-school. She truly was kind and loving woman... till her own disposition killed her.

Luckily enough the self-inflicted trance he had been experiencing was very fragile, needing an absolute deprivation of the senses or risking becoming undone as soon as one of his senses registered an external stimulus.

Like the barely perceptible change of the flow of the air around him. Something only one individual he knew was capable of causing.

“Did I interrupt your rest, Master? I am deeply sorry... feel free to punish me accordingly...”

The young and stoic voice of a certain blonde assassin reached him from his own shadow. a neat trick that was mostly reserved for demonic races or very specific job classes.

“There is no need, you just arrived at the right moment.”

He waved away the girl’s self-blame. She might be the most diligent person he had ever known, always ready to take accountability and receive her due punishment without complaints. He sometimes wondered what kind of twisted training she did go through to reach such a mindset... or maybe it was just her personality, seeing how her two twins did not seem to share her own eagerness for accountability and seemed to have a rather devious personality.

“I see...”

The blonde assassin whispered in an emotionless tone, sounding almost disappointed if Satoru didn’t know any better. She emerged from his shadow, seating on the floor and leaning against his legs, a position that reminded Satoru of a cat eager for praise.. or petting.

And in fact that position, in addition to her blonde hair reminding him of another, made his gloved hand instinctively dart out to gently pet her head before he could think his actions through.

He was about to retreat and apologize when he felt the young girl lean into his touch which made him doubt his sudden instinct to retreat.

Satoru just did what he did best in every situation... he just went with the flow, and so continued to pet the girl’s hair much to her apparent delight.

He still had his reservation about the triplet of assassins, but most of his doubts had been assuaged over these months both during and after the war. If they had managed to fool him for this long, he would almost let himself get jumped for the effort alone, key word being almost.

But he was quite sure that was not the case.

“How is the training of your honorary member coming along?”

He asked as he had only received reports on the matter till now and never actually had the chance to question any of her instructors directly.

“The bunny is not the most gifted trainee I ever oversaw, nor is she the most untalented... she is absorbing like a sponge anything related to mid and long distance fighting, while being quite subpar in anything regarding melee fighting.”

Satoru almost hesitated at the nickname. He had thought it quite adorable and teasing at first, something that showed these assassins were indeed still 14 years old girls under all their deadly training. That was until he inquired more and learnt that the nickname was given due to Neia’s eyes reminding the triplet of the eyes of some men-eating rabbit demi-humans living in the southeast of the continent.

But other than that morbid detail, everything else coincided with what he already read in Tia and Tina’s reports.

“That is... not exactly what I meant to ask.”

He felt the blonde girl tense at his words before she slightly shifted under his hand to meet his eyes, or rather his mask, with her coral ones.

“There are no signs of disloyalty or subterfuge on her part... and she is not the best at lying or masking her feelings... but if it pleases Master, I can dispose of her... I am sure Tia and Tina will get over it... eventually.”

This was not at all what he meant. He just wanted to know if she was integrating well and if she was getting along with everyone. But he guessed that, in a sense, she answered his question.

“There is no need for that, I just want her ready for the departure.”

The masked undead ordered.

“Yes, Master, she will be at an... acceptable level... and if anything displeases you I will... accept the consequences.”

This blondie was a diligent one for sure. So devoted as few who had been under him for far longer. If her loyalty proves true she might become one of his greatest assets in the war to come.

The inevitable conflict that had been already underway for a good couple years without him knowing, led by a perfect unknown if it wasn't for Evileye's information and switch of sides.

“Good, now... I have an appointment... so return to your duties and be good.”

The caster said before disappearing with a use of [Teleportation] before he could receive any answer from the young blonde.

He reappeared in a familiar back alley, the point where all of this began, a place that remained stuck in his mind for whatever reason. Well... that was a lie, he knew exactly why this so-not-clean place was stuck as a fond memory of his... this was where he met Renner for the first time after all. The young child who

had been a constant companion as much, if not more than Hilma, or anyone else he had met in this world.

A gifted young girl yearning for affection and purpose, to find her own path in this senseless world they inhabited.

A kindred soul, more similar to him than anyone he ever met in this or his previous life.

The first being who ever brought out these feelings out of him. To protect, cherish, and be a role model for her... he often found himself asking if she had brought the fatherly side he never knew to possess out of him. Or maybe more of a uncle type of affection...

Not having had any relevant examples in his life may be playing a role in him not managing to strictly define their relationship.

But either way, even without the exact words, he knew he wanted to see her prosper and succeed.

He did not appear here only for the sentimental value though, He had an appointment in a while but would rather have a calming walk to bury those memories that just resurfaced and reclaim his usual calm, not through imposition of his passive skill but rather through the normal process.

For all he was thankful for his [Emotional Suppression] as it came in clutch to save the day more than once since he arrived here. He still feared a prolonged use of it could actually alienate him from his own emotion or mess up his normal emotional regulation, coming to rely too much on the assumption his passive skill will do the work, and in the process making him take decisions he would not with a lucid mind.

He could not afford any miscalculations. Not now, a single misstep might expose one of his weaknesses, trump cards, or reveal to the enemy his knowledge of them.

The Platinum Dragon Lord... a title he never heard of before. And with good reason apparently given his secretive and cautious nature, and how he usually interacted with the world by puppeteering an armor and using aliases.

Satoru could respect the attitude, after all, that is what he would do to if he was in the dragon's position. But that also raised the problem that the said dragon was at least as cautious as him, and likely possessed more knowledge, and had access to more Yggdrasil items than he did.

The Floating City Eryuentiu. The Tree in the Center of the World.

A mobile fortress that at one point probably housed Players, everything pointing toward it being the guild base of the so called Eight Greed Kings. And depending on the state of their Guild Weapon, it might still have all its defenses active, maybe even under the control of the Dragon Lord.

But a solution for that was presented to him, by a source he would have never expected.

His two apprentices had told him about their misadventures in the Frostfang, and how they battled an undead Hyvern. A creature that did not even exist in Yggdrasil, as the Hyverns were only an event exclusive mount you could win, and no official undead version existed in the game. But this world apparently was not bound by the in-game limitations, as it previously showed many a time.

Honestly, all mounts were kind of trash in the game and the shitty devs had given up on them half-way through the game's lifetime.

Even a level 100 mount was often weaker than a NPC as it could hardly be equipped with anything, and the player mounting it was even restricted on their actions while atop it. It was just a bad mechanic that was never balanced.

Still, for the inhabitants of this world, even a being like that would be deadly to 99% of the population. But what surprised, and attracted his attention, more was the story of such a mount, apparently being the personal mount of one of the deadliest Greed Kings. A rare specimen he would have liked to experiment on and try to interrogate with his [Control Amnesia], too bad such a thing did not work on undead, or else he might have been quite cross with his young students for killing it for good.

But even if that was the case, the next thing they presented him with was the true priceless treasure.

His hand slipped under his robe as he accessed his inventory and brought out the pendant Arche gave him for further research as they could make no sense of what it was. But he knew best, mostly because he was familiar with such items, as was any guildmaster or guild member from Yggdrasil.

A Pledge of Allegiance, an item used to make sure guild defenses, naturally spawned minions, traps, and NPCs did not recognize an external creature as an enemy. it was used for friends who wanted to visit but were not part of the guild, or other types of special creatures... like bound mounts who were not recognized as NPCs or mercenaries and so did not add to the level cap the dungeon allowed.

And seeing to whom this belonged to... he had no doubt to which base this one allowed free entrance. He turned the pendant to once more reread the kanjis on its back.

“Rest peacefully, Toka-chan... Umu, quite the sentimentalist for a genocidal egomaniac...”

He cuckled to himself as he put the item away. It was quite morbid to call a Hyvern by the name of an anime protagonist meant for kids.

He had seen it a couple of times in his youth. You Can Do It! Toka-chan! Was an anime talking about a garden lizard trying every episode to just find a good place to laze around under the sun, dealing with all kind of nonsense in the process. It was one of those episodical types of anime, but he could not remember much else about it as his memory was hazy.

And yes, that did not explain the rest peacefully part. Maybe they had a pet they called after the anime character? And that pet died and the Hyvern was meant to be some sort of in-game tribute?

It all sounded quite farfetched, and he was honestly just speculating right now to get his mind away from the old memories he just stirred up in the silence of his room.

The important thing was that this item was now in his possession, giving him another huge trump card against his foe.

Be it for revenge, spite, or whatever other motivation the Dragon Lord may have. Satoru will not let him tear apart everything and everyone he came to cherish since he appeared in this strange new world.

And if the lizard wanted a war... he will give him one that will not leave survivors to cause more troubles in the future.

His dreadful thoughts were interrupted by the shout of someone. He turned his masked face only to meet the admired and awed gazes of a group of youthful individuals.

Apparently, lost as he was in his thoughts, his legs brought him back to the square of Rampossa I, just a few meters from a very familiar shop where everything began.

It was not uncommon for people to notice him when he went on his walk, a prime reason for why he usually stuck to alleyways. It made him uncomfortable how much respect they put in addressing him, and how, going by noble etiquette, he should not salute them back but just nod at them at most.

Oh, apparently him stopping in his track had given the idea to the youthful adventurers that it was okay for them to approach him.

“Lord Satoru! It is an honor!”

The young blonde adventurer that reached him first greeted him with a deep bow that brought his head to the height of Satoru’s knees.

His companions, another young blonde male with a sly grin, a redhead and only girl of the group, and an older blonde seemingly around Satoru’s own age, proceeded to bow and greet him as respectfully as the one he imagined to be their leader considering their formation.

Satoru said nothing, as in his eyes there was nothing to say. Introductions were clearly not needed on his part, and they were the one who approached him to begin with. The fact they did not limit themselves to a simple salute was the reason he wasn’t on his way already.

Apparently noticing his silence, the first blond raised his head in confusion before blushing profusely.

“M-my apologies! M-my name is Peter M-Mauk, Sir! No! I mea-Lord!”

The young adventurer basically fell over himself with his words as he introduced himself.

“I-I am the leader of Second Arc! We are a new silver-ranked group s-so I don’t expect his l-lordship to know-“

His ramblings where interrupted when the older man of the group placed a hand on his shoulder which made him fall silent.

“Peter, don’t be so tense, let us introduce ourselves as well, let’s not be rude toward Lord Satoru.”

The man’s words seemed to calm down the nervous youth as he managed to regain his bearings.

“My name is Dyne Woodwonder, it is an honor your Lordship.”

The older man introduced himself.

“L-Lukrut Volve, it is an honor!”

The second young blond gave Satoru his name.

“Brita... just Brita, my Lord, it is an honor.”

The tanned girl introduced herself at last, more meekly than he expected considering her well defined and imposing physique.

“It is an honor... Second Arc... I am sure we will hear great things from you all in the future.”

The three youths regarded him with stars in the place of eyes at his praise, while the older man gave him a satisfied smile of appreciation.

“Sir Moknach spoke much of your noble character! Our group’s name comes exactly from his own! Also, he has been the one who advised us to come to the capital as, while the Sorcerer’s Shop in

E-Rantel is well furnished, nothing can compare to the one in the capital! Where even the lost art of Runecraft can be found!”

‘Who’s that?’ Satoru could not help but ask himself as the name didn’t ring any bells in his mind... not even remotely, then again, he had never been great with names...

And so, there was only one thing to do before he made a fool of himself. His hand disappeared under his gown before accessing his inventory and extracting a small piece of decorated paper he offered to the young blond leader who accepted it immediately even without knowing what it was.

“I see, as proteges of my good acquaintance, I cannot refrain myself from contributing to your future... that is a coupon for a 10% discount on your next transaction, and it applies to all the items you buy in one single purchase... so buy as much as you can before using it to get the best out of the deal.”

He explained as the confusion disappeared from the faces of the adventurers only to be replaced by the brightest of smiles.

“““““Thank you, Lord Satoru!”””””

The whole group thanked him and bowed again as deeply as before.

“No need for thanks, to fund the next generation should be just the natural thing to do for anyone in my position... I hope I will soon hear of you again... now, forgive me, but I must be on my way as I would not wish to be late to my appointment... I bid you all farewell.”

He barely gave them time to say goodbye and thank him again that he was already on his way.

Truly, he escaped that situation by a hair, thank everything, he always carries some of those coupons on him as advertisement and as an offering to be left alone. After all, as he learnt by experience, giving someone a gift and immediately bidding farewell will put the other person in a position in which stopping him would be extremely rude.

He decided that was enough interaction for the day, and seeing how he would need to pass through some of the busiest streets of the capital to get to his destination, he decided he would rather avoid the endless salute and greetings on the way there.

With a quick cast of [Fly] he was already in the sky, darting toward the castle in the distance. It barely took him a couple minutes to reach his destination, and while he could land in the internal courtyard, he decided he would rather not make it difficult for the poor guards and escort who were probably awaiting his arrival at the main gate.

He slowly descended toward his target, landing gently in front of the guard standing at attention and greeting him with the royal military salute, which consisted of a fist being slammed on their chest plate.

“Greetings Marquis Satoru.”

His curiosity on who is escort would be this time was quickly answered by the gruff and familiar voice of a certain brown-haired warrior.

“Warrior Captain, a pleasure as always, his Majesty knows my tastes well when it comes to soldiers.”

He greeted back, maintaining the expected decorum, or at least he hoped so... but even if he didn't, he very much doubted anyone would make it known.

“I always volunteer, nothing less than the best for an esteemed pillar of the kingdom such as yourself, please, follow me this way, the King is waiting in his solar.”

The strongest man in the kingdom said with a smile before turning and showing him the way that he had memorized quite well by now.

Who would have thought? Him getting used to being escorted to a king... what would his friends think if they could see him now? Ulbert would throw a fit for sure...

What would his mother think?... Damn it... he was trying not to think about her right now.

They stopped in front of a familiar mahogany double door. Gazef announced them before entering into the solar.

The king looked as he always did, an old man seemingly tired of life and everything involved in it. At a first glance you would never think this was the ruler who had earned the nickname of Bloody King, an epithet fitting someone who ordered a purge of two thirds of his own noble class, and started the bloodiest war since the time of the Evil Deities.

Not that Satoru was innocent or someone to judge. He earned his own fair share of epithets. The Caster of Doom, the Black Dread of the Kingdom, the Four Gods' Bane, and his personal favorite... Harbinger of Death, that indeed sounded like a Yggdrasil class worth investing in.

“Marquis Satoru.”

The kind greeted him with a nod.

“Your majesty.”

He greeted back reciprocating the gesture, before seating down on the elegant chair in front of the king’s desk, after silently reinforcing it with a spell beforehand of course.

“Gazef, please leave us.”

The king ordered.

This was new, the king had never dismissed the Warrior Captain, a dear friend of his, ever before while meeting with the masked caster. Whatever he had been summoned for, it was clearly an incredibly private matter.

Satoru remained silent, waiting for the older man to take the lead.

“How are preparations for your expedition proceeding?”

The ruler asked pleasantly. If he wanted to take this slow, he really had no objection.

“Perfectly on schedule, I don’t think the departure will need to be delayed in the slightest.”

He answered truthfully, eliciting no reaction from the king.

“I see, I should not have expected any less from our Marquis of the East, alas, I have asked of you today not to talk to you as a king, but rather as a father.”

The old man continued, catching Satoru’s attention. He might have half an idea of where this was going but he would still not say anything, letting the king get whatever he wanted off his chest first.

“Renner will come with you, she convinced me she would be the best representative of the Crown... and it is my personal shame that I could not contradict her without lying... But this time around, Gazef won’t be able to escort her as her guard, my dear Alysanne’s demise still hangs over this kingdom, and reducing security around the Royal Family might invite action from those who hate us... we certainly don’t lack for enemies as of late... But Gazef assured me that Lady Aindra will be a capable guard for my daughter.”

So, it was about protection? Satoru could guess he understood the worry, but this should not even remotely be as dangerous as the Azerlisia expedition. After all, the most dangerous demi-humans of those lands were dead and gone thanks to the intervention of Slane. And their population had been halved as a result.

It should be all in all a very safe and relatively quick cleanup.

“Do not fear your majesty, it will be my prerogative to make sure the princess is safe at any moment, as I already did many a time during every other voyage that involved her.”

Satoru tried to reassure the old man of his capabilities, but his stoic expression did not change.

Silence descended between the two, before the father to five took a deep breath, as if preparing himself for a subject he clearly did not want to address but had seemingly no choice in the matter.

“I know I might not have been the best father, no, probably not even a great father... to none of my children... court-life took away much of my time and energy in my youth, and after the demise of my beloved wife... everything that remained was

sapped away as well... and I have probably neglected my duties, but most egregiously, my children... Renner included.”

Satoru said nothing as the man slumped a little more in his chair, losing the regality of a king and exposing the tiredness of a man who had witnessed too much disappointment from others... and most of all, himself.

It was a familiar sight for the magic caster. The reflection of a man of skin and blood he had seen too many times when he stood in front of his mirror, back into that desolate apartment in Japan.

“I didn’t even try to know her... dress her in a maid uniform and I would have not noticed her... that was, until you arrived... and something woke up inside her, some kind of fire... from that moment, in less than five years she had managed to become one of the most recognized figures of the kingdom, and one that will surely leave her mark in history... the pride of any father worth the name... and yet, I never felt like she recognized me as her father, not really... she calls me by the label, but her true feelings do not lay with me... a dutiful daughter who understands in which position she was born in... but alas, one who chose the father she wanted by herself, regardless of what the world said... and I can’t really fault her for it...”

The man monologued as his head fell, much like Satoru’s nonexistent stomach. He was no fool, he knew what the old king was implying, and for all his mind tried to deny it... the facts spoke clearly.

He even said it to himself a few times, how he would consider himself a fatherly figure to the children around him. It was a humorous jest, that is... until someone else said it aloud, and it suddenly did not sound at all like a joke he would tell himself.

“Satoru.”

The lack of noble address sounded wrong coming from the lips of the king. Too intimate. But he still could not bring himself to open his mouth.

“If it hadn’t been my Alysanne, but if it had been Renner in her place... what would you have done? “

The king lifted his head, to meet his eyes with Satoru’s, those same eyes his third daughter inherited.

He could not help but imagine those same eyes, completely devoid of life and empty. He knew that the attempt was meant for Renner initially, something the king still ignored. He remembered the simmering anger at the assassin, and how he made sure to hit where it hurt.

But... but he never actually thought of what would have happened if fate didn’t save Renner... and he had to witness the sight of her... pale and unmoving.

Something ugly, ravenous, and terrible simmered in the bottom of his soul. Something he could hardly contain. And before he could check his emotions or could think his answer through. His mouth opened by itself.

“I would have killed them all... carved a bloody path to every temple in the kingdom... and when I was done... I would have wiped off Baharuth and the Holy kingdom from the face of the world... every. last. one.”

The reinforced chair creaked under the pressure of his grip. But as quickly as it came, that unspeakable feeling was now gone.

“It is a lucky thing for them all then... that the victim was another... I feel shame in admitting, I cannot share the sentiment.”

Satoru glared at the old man from behind his mask. He had never had much of an opinion on him, but he felt like their last conversation had quite lowered his already lacking esteem.

“Please, take care of her... and remember that all children look up and learn from their parents... the gods only know I failed at that task.”

Satoru’s opinion of him was already on a free fall. He remembered his mother, how she smiled, how she worked herself to death out of love for her child, surviving by any means necessary in the rotten world of the 22nd century. And then he compared it with this old man born with a silver spoon... and all he could feel was disgust.

It was a rather good thing this fool had recognized Satoru was more of a father to Renner than he ever was... maybe he would just not cause her further pain and misery, it was no wonder she looked... so empty the first time they met in that alley, if this was all she could look forward when it came to family.

“I will, that girl is far too gifted for her own good... and I would see her blossom in the great woman I know she can be.”

He said, meaning every word, as he could already imagine what a fully matured and adult Renner could bring to this world.

“With those words, I cannot help but imagine you might be a good father to any future children...”

The comment was little more than a whisper, but Satoru caught him nonetheless and waved it away immediately with his hand. He needed no compliments for the... ameba, in front of him.

“It is not in my plans, if anyone wants to inherit what I gained through my own skill, they will have to show me they are worth of it... and when my times comes I might decide to whom to leave all I have gathered to my name.”

He hoped that this explanation he planned to use every time the matter of marriage or kids came up worked as a deterrent to try and lock him with someone else in some kind of political union.

The old man didn't react for a moment before a small and weak laugh made its way out of his mouth.

“You and Gazef might tie on the title of strangest person I have ever known... if that is indeed your approach to legacy, I can clearly see why you never took up a name for yourself... men in power are always fixated on keeping that power and passing it down to their blood... do they think that they somehow would live on through their descendants even when they are nothing more than food for worms? Only now I realize how silly that might look once you start to think of it clearly... but alas, I will leave the matter of inheritance to you, for I will be long gone by the time it will matter.”

Satoru said nothing, all this talk of parenthood made him wonder if his mother would be proud of him.

Yes... he thought so at least, and that... made the memory of her less painful.

“If that is all... your majesty, I think I would like to leave.”

The old man nodded.

“My apologies for taking your time... but I finally think... I finally think that I can see what Gazef, Renner, and even my Alysanne saw in you marquis... my daughter was right in telling me to talk to you from man to man.”

The admission only dug deeper his own opinion on the man. ‘So... you were not even the one who wanted to take this off your chest... it is a sad day when a daughter has to look after their pathetic excuse for a parent’ the masked undead thought before leaving without another word.

They have already talked enough for a lifetime.

“Satoru... is everything fine?”

It was strange to hear Gazef sound worried when referring to him, he must truly have looked weird for someone like Gazef noticing something was wrong with him, seeing how every of his features was hidden.

“It is fine Gazef, the talk with the king just left me... pensive.”

‘And with a bad taste in my mouth... and that is quite the achievement seeing how I cannot physically eat anything’ he lamented in his mind.

“I see, if I may just burden you with one small other thing... I would like to discuss a matter with you as well... in private, but I don’t want you to remain here longer than you need... I can escort you to your mansion and then we can talk.”

That was... rather strange, and not something he would have expected from the seemingly nervous Warrior Captain.

But he guessed that whatever he had to talk to him about, it could not be remotely as bad as what he just went through.

He blinked, still completely stunned by the sudden explosion of light and sound... but even more... by the completely unexpected gathering.

Renner, Hilma, Lakyus, Evileye, Rayne, and Arche.

He knew today was his birthday, but who else...

Oh, Hilma and Renner knew...

He glanced toward the blonde duo of vixens.

This was truly...

It hardly happened in his life when he had no words to describe something, or any idea on how to react.

But this was one of them.

After all... no one ever celebrated his birthday... not since that day...

He glanced back to a now smiling Gazef... he was onto it... and he didn't even notice...

"How... how did you arrange all this?"

He asked no one in particular, his stunned state only now starting to get suppressed to the point he could articulate a logical question. After all, he has been gone for just little over two hours.

"Humph, for a caster which such a reputation... just underestimate magic way too much..."

The only other masked caster mocked him in jest.

"Come on Satoru! Don't just stand there! We got gifts and cake!"

Lakyus waved him over with a grin that could split her face in two.

Still, his body refused to move as a strange and comforting warmth spread all over him from his core.

He felt a small hand grasp his, he looked down at the golden-haired girl, her eyes beaming at him with mischief and resolution. A complete 180 compared to the empty gaze he had been greeted by so many years ago.

“Here, come along, today is your day after all, so... let me spoil you for once.”

And with that, the young princess broke the spell, bringing him forward.

He looked around himself, the smiling, and eager faces of all those he had surrounded himself with looking back at him.

‘What is this... what is this feeling?’ he asked himself as he felt that strange warmth become ever stronger to the point of overwhelming him. And even if his body could not physically allow it, he felt the need to shed tears in that moment. His body having recognized the strange feeling before his mind would.

After all it had been years, many years since the raids, the laughter, the joys and the sorrows, and all he shared with a group of forty other people in a videogame.

‘I had almost forgot... this is... happiness’ at long last he abandoned himself to the sensation overcoming him, like a pup recognizing their owner after years of separation. He let himself melt into it.

He only wished... this happiness could last forever.

For, no matter who tried to take this from him.

He will protect this fragile crystal with all he had.

He will have his happiness still by the end of it.

Never again.

No matter the cost.

Thus, he swore upon the mother who loved him and died for the happiness he so much sought.

A.N.

And here we are, at the end of a very intrusive chapter on Satoru's character development till now. Poor guy might be oblivious and emotionally stunted, but once he locks in on something, there is little to nothing anyone can do to stop his endless pursuit.

As you noticed, this was a special chapter very unlike others, and not only because it is chapter 100, but also because it is what I call a "named" chapter, or a chapter with the name of a character in the title, of which there are only ten planned in the entire story. This being the first one.

Not gonna lie, I took inspiration from the Re:Zero novel for this, as I really like the concept of a chapter going in depth on a character and reaching a conclusion or turning point for them. But I also added my own twist to it, adding also an epithet to the character in the title.

Sorry for the longer wait, but this chapter gave me serious problems on maintaining and shifting the tone all over without actually being abrupt or jarring (I hope the final result managed that). Flashback and the talk with Ramposa gave me serious writer block, I probably rewrote the latter like 4 times.

Well, I am kinda tired and it is like 2 am while I am writing this.

So, remember to leave a comment / review with your thoughts or opinions!

Till next time! Stay safe!