

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

Story Starts

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Book 1 - The Empty Twin

Ch 3.3 Depersonalization-Derealization

[Part 3 of ?]

CONTENT WARNING: *This chapter explores a character's traumatic past, including non-graphic depictions of physical, mental, and sexual abuse. These challenging themes are crucial for understanding the character's journey.*

'Flashback'

The last few years have been a suffocating mire of guilt, anger, confusion, sadness, apathy, self-pity, doubt, hate, jealousy, shame, fear, frustration, loneliness, disgust, and resentment. Trapped within the gem my sister inherited, I seethed, remembering our father's dismissive words—his conviction that this tormented life was my “best opportunity.”

My emotions were a chaotic storm: anger and self-pity at my own inadequacies; my confusion and rage at the horrors I was subjected to; a complex mix of love, hate, guilt, shame and apathy toward my former family; and finally, a searing, all-consuming hate for the root cause of my suffering.

These storms raged within me. I yearned for it all to vanish.

Zouken, all roads lead to Zouken, my resentment, pain, humiliation, anger—these were my constant companions bred within the pits of his workshop. The violation, the agony, the torture. I remembered gazing into his

cold, mocking eyes as he watched his familiars assault me: stimulating, shameful, dirty, their lust-fueled frenzy draining my Od.

He'd weave seemingly innocent tales, dangling bits of hope, only to later twist a dagger deep into my psyche. A balancing act to bend without snapping, to warp without mending, to destabilise without breaking.

The first bit of hope dangled before me came from my adoptive uncle. After three days of suffering, when Zouken first threw me into the pit, after those nights wishing for my sister to save me—Kariya Matou made a deal with my adoptive grandfather to win the Holy Grail War for Zouken in exchange for my freedom.

Of course, I wasn't even granted any reprieve during Kariya's seemingly impossible labour as I was still subjected to Zouken and my adoptive father, Byakuya's experiments and cruel training.

In the end, nothing mattered as that small bit of hope was snuffed as I watched Zouken's familiars devour my once cherished adoptive uncle, a bitter end to his defeat during the Holy Grail war, solidifying Zouken's power and position as someone you should never oppose.

Kariya's tragic fate has ripped away any lingering hope that will one day help me escape this pit of despair, as the cruelty under the Matou household continued unabated.

Shinji, another one of my tormentors, it started with him just picking on me as a typical older brother might with his younger sister. In fact, at some point, I think he did once think of me as a younger sister, but it all changed.

Again with Zouken, twisting my adoptive brother into a spiteful being as he fed his jealousy over my position as the Matou heir—a "privilege" I would have traded anything, even my soul, for even a moment of reprieve.

Since then, I've been a victim of his abuse. He twisted my pity for his perceived usurped status—a title unattainable given the Matou lineage's decline—into subservience. He would regularly defile my body for his perverse and sadistic pleasure, a violation that left me physically and emotionally broken, all while sustaining the Crest Worms within me. These parasitic, artificial living circuits served as a medium for the Matou sorcery trait.

Despite the torment from my adoptive family, the prime catalyst that sent me down this path of the damned lay solely with my own bloodline.

As there's nothing more that embodies my mixed feelings for my bloodline than my relationship with Rin, my former sister: a tangled knot of hate, anger, resentment, guilt, jealousy, frustration, shame, and fear.

These negative feelings festered within me, born from the injustice of being cast aside. My elemental alignment was deemed both an inconvenience and a boon: an inconvenience due to my incompatibility with my former family's sorcery trait of conversion. Yet, it was a boon, for it made the decision of who would inherit the family crest that much easier, leading to my adoption by the Matou family and my instant disconnection from the Tohsaka name.

Any lingering hope that they hadn't known about the Matou's true practices, any confusion that once softened the blow, quickly devolved into something ugly.

During those first two days of suffering under Zouken's care, I yearned for her attention, her affection, for Rin to save me from the suffering somehow. But hope was never met.

Instead, Zouken delighted in mocking my yearning. He ridiculed my apparent stupidity, describing Tokiomi, my former father, as the quintessential magus and Rin, the chosen heir, as the embodiment of their traditions, mindset, and thirst for discovery.

I can still hear the words that initially sealed my doubt: “Do you think they would save you if they knew about what you’re experiencing as the Matou heir? Anything is justified for the betterment of magecraft, discovery, and any pathway towards the Root. I assure you—” he paused for a second as he looked directly into my eyes, his face a mask of serenity as he drove his point. “If given the chance to learn about the Matou’s magecraft, they wouldn’t have batted an eye at your predicament.”

All of these sufferings I endured, only for one reason, one last bastion of light in my seemingly dark and decrepit life.

It was just about a year and a half before the Holy Grail War. I was already aware of his constant presence around my adoptive brother. At first, I didn’t really care for him as he was just another tool that my brother exploited.

There may be some form of actual friendship between them, but in the end, he was just a fellow tool, and amongst the tools, I was the most used of them all, so why would I care?

Eventually, as I was exposed to him more and more, I began to see myself in him. There was something off about Shirou Emiya: his eyes didn’t always reflect his projected emotions. It was like seeing those pictures that bordered on looking real, to the point of becoming uncanny.

That’s where I realised this is a fellow broken person, but unlike me, who just apathetically goes through life—with no hopes and dreams, doing the bare minimum of what’s expected, silently accepting everything thrown at me without a sense of self-worth. His sheer stubbornness to be more than what he is has flickered something within me.

The more I observed this individual, the more I felt a detached admiration for him, and a faint sting of jealousy. His lack of self-worth was apparent to most; it was how Shinji took advantage of him and how he earnestly fulfilled every

request for help, without expectation of return. Earning him the somewhat mocking moniker of 'Fake Janitor'.

This drive, above all else, was Shirou Emiya's singular talent: his unyielding stubbornness to always strive for his best, even to his own detriment.

How does he persist? What innate quality allowed one broken individual to continue functioning in such a way?

This was also one of the reasons I felt jealous of him, at first. It's hard to look in the mirror and find yourself lacking. But this mirror, though fragmented, still stood defiant. It reflected not my passive emptiness, but an active, if futile, pursuit of self-repair.

At first, they were just casual observations from a distance. However, after learning of my interest, probably through the crest worms embedded within me and his various familiars around Fuyuki and neighbouring towns, Zouken ordered me to increase my surveillance of him. He revealed that Shirou Emiya was the adopted son of the infamous, now deceased, Magus Killer, Kiritsugu Emiya, and that he might be the, or at least a, representative of the Einzberns in the upcoming Grail War.

From my initial observations, Shirou seemed to be just another typical high schooler, with no indications of living a double life as a magus. But then again, Rin, my former sister, perfectly projects a sense of normality in her public life, albeit in a standout way, as she is considered the school's idol.

His daily school life primarily consisted of helping out with menial tasks around the school campus and hyper-focusing on his kyudo, where he repetitively practised, hitting the target without fail for hours, only stopping for water, bathroom breaks, and when the members started cleaning up the dojo for closing.

It was during one lunchtime, when I overheard Ayako Mitsuzuri loudly complain to Rin as she glared vehemently at Shinji across the yard as he regaled his tale about their kyudo competition last weekend to a group of girls.

Ayako recounted a kouhai's account: during their post-victory celebrations, they had overheard Shinji berating Shirou as they delivered food and drinks set aside for him. He'd claimed Shirou embarrassed the school by continuing the competition despite his injuries.

Shinji's cutting remarks aimed to twist the situation, implying that from the perspective of the judges and other participating schools, it must have looked as if Homurahara had shamelessly forced their injured 'ace' to compete.

But Ayako and those in the know understood; Shirou stubbornly concealed the injury and still persisted through with the competition of his own accord.

Unfortunately, during his final draw, his elbow was exposed to everyone present, leading to him being summarily approached by one of the judges and a medical staff member.

What's more, they asked Shirou to show his elbow, then had his entire right arm exposed for everyone to see the full extent of his injury. His repetitive practice had clearly damaged both his rotator cuff and elbow.

Shirou, however, was able to insist that he continued the competition of his own accord and that they shouldn't blame the school. He was then summarily berated by the judge, the medical staff member, and apparently their club adviser.

Rin pointed out that Shinji did somewhat have a point that he embarrassed the school, but Ayako insisted that Shinji did it with malice and that no other person in the club is blaming Shirou.

Her rant concluded with a frustrated shout as she revealed she'd received Shirou's resignation letter, despite all her attempts to convince him otherwise.

I had caught a glimpse of Shirou coming to school that morning, looking more subdued than usual, but hadn't thought much of it until now. He typically did his busybody work after lunch, often with Issei in tow, but he was conspicuously absent today.

According to what I overheard, their teacher had summarily sent him home during homeroom, ordering him to rest for the whole week and avoid anything strenuous.

I don't really know what compelled me to do what I did next, as I found myself standing in front of Fujimura-sensei. I asked if there was any schoolwork I could bring to Shirou Emiya.

The famously loud and outgoing teacher just grinned as she gathered some documents on her desk, asked me to wait while she skipped, whistled, and hopped towards the photocopying machine.

While waiting for Fujimura-sensei to return, the sliding door at the other side of the faculty room suddenly opened. A knot of conflicting emotions tightened within my stomach as my former sister entered and beelineed towards the energetic teacher.

I couldn't quite make out their conversation, though Fujimura-sensei's loud laugh punctuated whatever the poised and dignified Rin Tohsaka said.

Turning towards my direction, Fujimura-sensei performed her skipping return as Rin followed her. Our gazes met, as her eyes widened for a second and shifted, and then she easily composed herself.

Fujimura-sensei excitedly slammed the photocopied notes and documents on her desk as she pulled out two sticky notes and wrote something on them.

She then split the pile of documents in two, handing half to me and the other half to Rin.

“Here as well, I would appreciate it if you both take over kitchen duties—he’ll probably be stubborn about it. I think this is enough for a dinner of four. I’ll be there around 7:00 or 7:30. Oh yeah, Sakura, is your grandfather always home? Rin, do I still need to inform your guardian?” She said as she handed me five one-thousand-yen bills.

I remember nodding dumbly as the loud teacher bulldozed through everything, giving neither of us a chance to speak.

“Great, I’ll let your guardian know that you’ll be home late.” Then she quickly ushered us outside of the faculty room, slamming the sliding door close. I could hear the distinct sound of the door locking, as she cheered loudly about no more distractions, declaring she’d finish everything by 6.

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At that moment, I was feeling many things, but at the forefront of this all was something simmering, bubbling, and tightening at my chest.

Ever since I was subjected to the whims of the Matou household, my only constant has been my apathy, emptiness, and my duty as their tool. Ever since that final hope, embodied within the devoured corpse of my once cherished adoptive uncle, was snuffed out.

Why feel when everything is just pain? Why care when everything was just suffering? Why hope when everything could be taken away?

My passing interest towards a fellow broken tool aside, I was just a hollow doll, subject to the whims of my ‘better’. So it was a little jarring when I felt something akin to heat within my body.

This heat pulses every time I see Rin try to peek behind, as her guilt over my abandonment was quite evident. Five or was it six? Either way, it was about half a decade of silence, and she now wants to what? Small talk? Just because we're in public for everyone to see, where could her public persona be questioned?

I clutched the paperwork I'm holding against my chest tighter, a bag of groceries looped around my elbow, as I again slowed my pace as she tried to slow hers again, trying to match her pace to mine as I firmly held to my two arms' length distance behind her.

Unfortunately, we couldn't continue this cycle before we inevitably stopped, so I tempered my feelings and feigned interest in a video signage depicting a girl in a maid uniform doing a cute dance to a jingle as she 'blesses' a steaming plate of omurice.

I increased my pace as I ignored Rin, shifting my attention from the advertisement towards the bus that had just arrived and boarded. I dropped 500 yen into the farebox and cupped my hands below the device to receive my change. Rin followed closely behind, almost missing the bus as she rushed towards its closing doors.

I frowned as the only seats available were the priority seats, so Rin and I were forced to stand close together as we held on to the bus's hand strap.

Dispassionately looking at the scenery passing by, Rin suddenly blocked my vision as she again fidgeted and hesitated, as she clearly struggled to find her words.

"Sakura..."

I tried to pluck up the courage to look her in the eyes, but as her guilt-ridden gaze finally met mine, I immediately broke eye contact, shifting my eyes downward as a tired sigh escaped my mouth.

Light giggles broke my mulling as I saw two little girls playing with each other on one of the seats, as the slightly taller one was trying to tie the smaller one's hair into pig-tails, as their mother tried to hush their laughter, not wanting to disturb the other passengers.

From my periphery, I saw Rin too looking at the sight, and she visibly flinched at the reminder of what once was. I again tried to take a peek at my former sister as she now looked at my hair, specifically at my hand clutching the red ribbon I'd instinctively reached for.

“Ummm..”

This time, I summarily rebuffed her attempt by moving toward the opposite side of the bus, turning my back on her.

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Pressing the red button signals my intention to alight. As I stepped down the bus and moved towards the general direction of my destination, I increased my pace as I di--

“Wait, Sakura—” A hand suddenly grabbed my wrist, preventing me from moving forward. I then turned and stared towards the hand tightly grasping my wrist.

“Could we just talk for a minute? I really wanted to catch up. How are your magus studies with the Matous?”

I visibly flinched at her statement; she unfortunately didn't see this as she frantically talked about her magus studies, her excuses in not reaching out, how she missed me, and a lot more things as I didn't really process anything she said as I remained blankly staring at the hand grasping at my wrist.

My mind is now devoid of anything, as I just feel a sense of tiredness.

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END

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