Chapter 62: Perspective

I do not own Fate/Stay Night and stuffs.

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Irisviel wandered around the property aimlessly.

She knew she was being watched. Be it by Servant or familiar. It didn’t matter to her. She had no intention or desire to do anything of the like.

Her mind was oddly at peace here. Serene. Only a minor agitation in the back of her thoughts stirred every now and then, that she should be productive. She attributed the newfound calm to Caster’s upgrades to the bounded fields, and the stirring to her connection to the Grail.

It was relieving. Like a pressure was finally being let out of her skull.

Unfortunately, it did nothing to alleviate the ache in her chest.

The shed that she had spent so much time in, and housed so many mixed feelings, was being used as a workshop. Her son no doubt used it for his own devices now, and if she was correct, Caster had added her own touch to the defenses as well. She didn’t know whether to be proud or concerned that he allowed another Master’s Servant so much control over the property, but these were interesting times. There was much she still didn’t know.

In the meantime, she would just chalk it up to the attractive blonde young woman having a crush on her son. He was cute after all. And certainly reliable if things had gotten to the point that she had been summoned to begin with.

Come to think of it, many of the Masters in this war were rather attractive young women. Maybe one of them was going out with him already? She’d have to ask around.

Her body shivered as the thought of grandchildren crossed her mind. Illya had still been just a child when Irisviel had died, and she had just been summoned in the same body. It was too early to think of grandchildren already… wasn’t it?

She shook her head and gave one last look at the shed before turning away. It was best to stay away from another Magus’ workshops regardless whether or not she could break in. Proximity based spells did exist after all, and she didn’t want to risk triggering them.

The yard was kept in good condition. The grass was clipped. The plants were healthy. The walls were clean. The roof was well kept. There was a small set of archery targets against one wall, which was new.

She wandered inside, but made sure to stay away from the bedrooms. The other Servants would obviously not take it well if she lingered there for too long.

The hallways were clean. The living room was warm. The kitchen was exquisite and certainly not the one she remembered. Definitely not Kiritsugu’s doing.

It felt like… home. The home she would have, could have lived in this past decade had things been different.

“Is it wrong for me to miss a place so much and say it’s mine, even when I barely knew it?” She smiled sadly.

Kiritsugu didn’t say anything as he stood quietly behind her. He didn’t have a right to answer that question.

“I can already see what it would have been like. Even feel it. More clearly than in the castles back in Germany or in the forest near here. Illya will adore living here. Shirou did an amazing job with this place. And you did a better one with him.” She turned to look at her husband with a genuinely happy smile and tears falling from her eyes. “I couldn’t have asked for a better family.”

“Iri.” Kiritsugu tightened his fists. “I, don’t deserve that. If you knew what happened, what could have happened in this war... I’ve made too many mistakes. It was only by luck that things turned out the way they have. Even I still can’t explain some of it…”

His words were confusing. She knew her husband. Luck was certainly something he didn’t like to blame things on, let alone mention in conversation if he could help it. Clearly there was a bizarre factor that she didn’t know about that he believed would change her perspective on things. “What are you talking about, my love? Something you can’t explain?”

Kiritsugu faltered and licked his dry lips, debating whether or not to push the topic, before thinking better of it. “When I was alive, I had dreams of the Fifth War. I… failed, Iri. Without knowing better, I made things worse. For Shirou. For Illya. I died making things worse. It would only be due to sheer dumb luck and happenstance that things would turn out without damning the world with the Grail. And even after that, Illya would still die. And Shirou…”

“Would still be a vampire?” She guessed.

Kiritsugu laughed. It was the bitter, ironic sort of laugh that betrayed just how bad the situation is. “A vampire? If only. No. Shirou… because of my stupidity, he became what I gave up. He sacrificed everything and became a Hero. A Counter Guardian.”

Irisviel froze. She may not be a genuine Heroic Spirit, but she sure as hell knew what a Counter Guardian was and what their jobs entailed. “What? But, how do you-”

“Archer’s on the roof.” He cut her off, and made her realize that she had never seen the last of the Servants in the War. “He, failed to save Illya after his War. Between my half assed teaching and the year she had left… after that, he just, wandered. Did exactly what I used to do. And eventually made a deal with Alaya. If that doesn’t underscore just how terrible of a father I am, I don’t know what does.”

“A Counter Guardian? Our boy?” She trembled, all of her positive emotions quickly dying off by the news. “He’s, Archer?”

“Yeah. And he’s even worse than I am when it comes to talking to people.” Assassin tried to smile, and failed. “Don’t bring him up with Shirou though. He, I don’t know. Something about Archer simply goes against him. It wasn’t even this bad in my dreams when Archer actively tried to kill him.”

“What?”

Oops.

“Guess this is a bad time to mention that Archer’s gambling to cause a paradox and off himself and get out of being a Counter Guardian.”

Not that that would work now with the revelation of the Counter Force being perpetually at work on him.

“*Our Heroic Spirit Son* is trying to paradox himself from causality?”

“Not anymore. Or at least, not here.” He lamely excused himself. “This isn’t his timeline. Actually this one has diverted so long ago from his that even he’s surprised he was able to be summoned here at all.”

“Kiritsugu.” Clearly his efforts to deescalate the situation were not working.

He sighed and dropped his hands. “Iri. What do you want me to do? I’ve talked to him as much as I can about this, and it’s not exactly a topic he’s particularly fond of discussing. Let alone repeatedly. Illya’s had a go. Even his Master has had her own attempt or twelve. Archer has never met you. The fact that even I was able to have an opportunity to talk to him is a miracle in itself, and that was after we nearly killed one another several dozen or so times over the War. The best thing you can do is be patient for now, and maybe he’ll open up eventually.”

Irisviel closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Despite being a Servant, she could already feel a headache coming on. “You said this, current turn of events, came from dreams you had?”

“Yeah. I never could find out where they originated.” He was glad for the change in conversation. “But I did what I could with them.”

“Including us being here?”

He shook his head. “No. I, we, shouldn’t be here Iri. Even now I don’t understand it. You’d know better than me at this point.” And to be frank, he was quietly terrified what it could mean further down the line. Seeing his son and daughter alive and have a future was a blessing in so many ways, but he… was Kiritsugu Emiya. He had a bad track record when it came to keeping his loved ones alive.

“Kiritsugu, if Archer is a Counter Guardian, then by chance are you…?”

“No. I’m a genuine Heroic Spirit. Somehow. Barely. I never made a deal with Alaya, nor was I ever offered the chance to make one.” Assassin shook his head.

Iri let out a small sigh of relief and leaned against a wall. “… How did it come to this Kiritsugu? I’m me. You’re you. Our son is either an Apostle or has his soul enslaved for eternity. Illya’s somehow the only one of us that has a hope for a normal future if whatever you have planned actually works out. And here I thought the Fourth War was unreasonable.”

“I know.” He slowly, hesitantly, closed the distance between them before leaning up right next to her. It was the closest he had allowed himself to be to her since they were alive. “That said, you’ve calmed down a bit.”

She laughed bitterly. “Caster’s bounded field. I didn’t even notice it until I was left alone again. My mind… it was like being overwhelmingly drunk and constantly steered in a specific direction. So disorienting that I didn’t even know that I was dizzy to begin with. But, even now I can feel the Grail, Kiritsugu. It wants to be complete. Needs to be.”

“Mmm. We’re working on it. It will go faster if you can help us out.” He didn’t tell her what some of the others had planned just in case, but he knew she suspected a few things regardless. She was of the Einzbern family. She was no fool.

“From here? Or outside? I’m not sure how much aid I can be in my current state.” Her hand reached for his, only to stop at the last moment. “I don’t know if I should even touch you anymore. Kiritsugu, I killed you.”

He closed the distance and held her hand in his. “And I killed you.”

Her eyes began to well up with tears as her head sagged and leaned against his shoulder. “I don’t want history to repeat itself, my love. It was painful enough the first time. If we did it again, with Shirou and Illya here…”

“We won’t. We’re prepared this time,”

“How could anyone be prepared for this?” She chastised.

“We know it’s there. We know what it wants. All the Masters and Servants. That’s already far more than before.” He gripped her hand. “That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

“… Mmm. I suppose you’re right.” Her eyes closed, exhausted. “At least one good thing came from this mess.”

“I’d say that this entire disaster was nothing but a mixed bag, Iri.”

“… I wasn’t joking earlier, Kiritsugu. When I spoke to Barthomelloi about me being a problem.”

“… I know.”

“Promise me you won’t hesitate if it ever comes to that. If I fall too far to be helped anymore.”

“I won’t. You know that.”

“Promise me Kiritsugu.”

“… I promise.”

“… I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s not your fault.” At this point he was holding his wife close as she cried softly in his arms.

After over a decade, Kiritsugu and Irisviel had finally spent their first night together in the home he had bought for them. Leaning up against the living room wall in the middle of the night. No sheets. No pillows. Just the two of them quietly apologizing to one another and hoping that their trials would finally come to a close for them and their children.

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“Did you notice how much she lingered around Caster’s room at the beginning?” Rider asked from the rooftop.

“She’d probably attracted to the Lesser Grails.” Archer shrugged. “She knows about Illya and Sakura and is making an effort to avoid them, but she doesn’t know where the shrew is staying.”

“We’ll warn the others in the morning.” Rider conceded. She didn’t bother to ask if Assassin or Merem noticed. There was no point in asking rhetorical questions like that.

“Mmm.”

“…”

“…”

The pair remained silent as they meandered on the roof, keeping an eye out for potential intruders.

“… If you have something to say, then say it.” Archer broke the silence first. “You’re not the type to linger unless you have something on your mind. And it’s not like everyone else isn’t waiting to unload something on me lately.”

If he was aiming to deter Rider from speaking, he failed. “Did you ever try to save Sakura?”

“Pardon?”

“When you were alive. Did you try to help her? Or at least deal with Zouken?”

Whatever he was expecting, that wasn’t it. “… I assume she wasn’t the one that wanted to know this.”

“She wouldn’t. And she didn’t.”

Meaning that Rider wouldn’t tell her Master unless asked. And that she wasn’t listening now.

“… Like I said before, Rider. My memory from life is fragmented at best. Even summoned properly, it takes me a moment to recall what everyone here looked like, even Illya.”

He was stalling. “You didn’t do anything.”

“I was an idiot when I was alive.” He admitted with surprisingly some remorse. “An oblivious idiot. I’m pretty sure I made that clear enough by now. I, don’t remember much about what happened to her after I left Fuyuki. I went to the Clocktower, and started travelling. Trying to be a hero and all that stupidity. I rarely came back after that. But, when it came to Sakura, I did hear that something did happen to her, and Rin… didn’t take it well. I don’t think I heard from her after that, and Rin never told me the few times I talked to her either. Only that… she had dealt with it and I shouldn’t bother.”

Come to think of it, he was somewhat certain that it was around then that the two started to truly distance from one another. Not that he could blame her.

A story untold, and yet one with mountains of details clearly heard regardless. “And when you were summoned as a Servant?”

He gave her a dry snort. “I told you, I’m rarely summoned as I should. Maybe, maybe I tried to help her the first several hundred or so times I did manage to recall everything. Deal with Zouken. Even I can’t tell if it was out of my desire to do the right thing or out of simple guilt for failing someone that was right in front of me all this time. Succeeded a good number of them. Failed most of the rest. But, soon enough my goals, my wish and goals changed. You already know what I want Rider. I’ve seen everyone die enough times to know that I can’t do this forever.”

Even saving them held little to no weight anymore if he just had to go through the same process endlessly.

He just, wanted it to be over already. He was tired of all the meaningless death and murder around him.

She didn’t blame him for it. His experience mirrored her own in more than a few ways. The only difference was that she found peace and redemption in death, while Archer was trapped by it.

“You really are a fool.”

He wasn’t surprised by the scathing words. He had been called that enough times that it held little effect on him anymore. “How so?”

“Only Shirou Emiya would blame himself for being put in an unreasonable situation and not obtain the ideal outcome in the end.”

That, on the other hand, managed to hurt. Deeply at that.

Before he could say anything to get back at her, the lithe Servant turned her back on him and began to vanish. “I suppose it is fitting, that the only ones here that truly hold you in contempt go by Shirou Emiya. Only an idiot of that nature would hold such comedic standards.”

He let out a bitter laugh as she vanished.

“Yeah, well, if you haven’t noticed yet, the existence of Shirou Emiya seems to be destined to be a modern comedy.”

He had warned the others multiple times, but nobody seemed to want to acknowledge the depth that the Shirou Emiya of this world seemed to reject Counter Guardian EMIYA, even more than the normal variants did. It was more than a fundamental disagreement, but an instinctual hatred, a genuine disgust that would almost make Gilgamesh interested to see fester just to see what would come of it.

EMIYA still didn’t know what it was just yet, but for once he hoped he didn’t find out.

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*To say that she had woken up was a bit of an overstatement. To wake up meant that she had gained consciousness, something she had never truly possessed. A minor awareness, perhaps. Just enough to detect when she was not alone, that there were others around her, speaking and discussing matters at hand. But that was the extent of her mental facilities as of now. Ideas, desires, and the like were beyond her. “I am hungry” was degraded to the sensation of “hunger”, not that she truly ate like most entities.*

*That said, she did get curious every once in a while whenever she was no longer alone. She could understand the words of conversations nearby, even if she could not follow what they said. Occasionally, when she had been left alone for long enough, she would even develop loneliness, even if she never once uttered a sound.*

*“She looks absolutely nothing like you.”*

*That, was a new voice.*

*“That is somewhat the point. It would be troubling if she did.”*

*So was that one.*

*“Most parents would be depressed to hear that.” The first sounded… amused. How odd. Rarely did anyone near her show emotion, let alone a positive one. “Ironic though, with her looks, she’s more passable than you are.”*

*“Do stop your jests. I have trouble tolerating you as it is. How I let you convince me to participate in this farce I still don’t know.” The second voice was younger, but irritable.*

*“Judging from your tone, I’m guessing she doesn’t meet your expectations.” The first sighed. “A pity. I thought you’d develop something of a soft spot to her. While she doesn’t’ look like you, she does share quite a resemblance with…”*

*“Don’t you even try to compare them with this toy.”*

*She didn’t know why but she felt a flicker of discontent with that statement. She had been demeaned and experimented on countless times before. The pain during each process varied from agonizing to maddening when she was aware of it all. However for some reason, this comment seemed to hit deeper than that. As though she had been reduced to something that was irrelevant regardless of what became of her in the end.*

*“Were you not the one that was hoping for just that? That faint gamble of hope to beat the odds and conjure an alternative to the current status quo?” The first smugly asked. “A third for the third. Or was it because it was the third that you saw potential promise in this endeavor?*

*The surroundings quaked with mana, and anger. Enough that she could feel and even comprehend it in her addled state.*

*“Careful Kaleidoscope. You are no longer as strong as you once were.”*

*“Sorry. I sometimes forget your true nature. Regardless, it appears this test was a failure as far as our mutual desires are concerned. Mysteries rooted in the current era and man do not mix well with the results that was desired. Even if True Magic is involved.”*

*“… Do not play ignorant. You knew this was likely to happen.”*

*“As did you.”*

*There was an uncomfortable silence.*

*“Why were you so adamant for my help, Kaleidoscope? It was not because you wished to gamble on a hopeless endeavor.”*

*“… Our young one here has an important role to play for the world. In the future, certain resources need to be available in order for humanity, and the current world itself, to endure. She is the key to it all.”*

*“And my help was needed?”*

*“This time, yes.”*

*“No matter how much you claim to distance yourself from the standards of other Magi, you certainly know how to emulate the worst of their habits.”*

*“My friend, we both know I am nothing of the sort, otherwise you would not have cooperated with as much as you have.”*

*“Forgive me for my distain for being used.”*

*“If it assuages your impression of me at all, I had also hoped that our mutual endeavor would prove fruitful. If for her sake.”*

*“… Even if it was a failure, the others will not take it well if they found out about this.”*

*“Rest assured, there is little reason for her to cross the paths of anyone that might be able to see what she might have been. Knowledge of your involvement will be lost in time save for a scant few.”*

*Might have been? Were they talking about a test she had failed?*

*“Be sure that it does, or I will drag you down with me Kaleidoscope. You have more enemies than I do. There’s a reason why you’re the Fourth.”*

*“Perish the thought.” The first laughed, good heartedly. “Rest assured, she can be considered as much mine as she is yours. It would leave a bad taste in my mouth if I was the cause of her misfortune.”*

*“I have a hard time grasping the fact you said that with a straight face. I can only imagine the vile substances you taste perpetually.”*

*“Humph. There’s no need to be rude… where are you going?”*

*“I was here only for a gamble of an experiment. It failed, so I have no reason to linger in this depressing place. You may use her as you wish. I have no further interest in what becomes of a toy made for someone else’s game.”*

*“Aaah. Leaving me already with the child by myself? What a terrible parent you are.”*

*“It is a jester’s role to entertain the mindless. Do recall I have other obligations to attend to.”*

*“And you do recall that the jester is oft the wisest one in the King’s Court.” The first sighed, sounding somewhat tired. “If nothing else, I hope your endeavors yield you more than what we’ve accomplished here.”*

*“As we do with all new endeavors.” The second voice sounded further away now. For a moment, she thought that it had left entirely. “… Has a name been decided?”*

*“Did you have anything in mind?”*

*“Of course not. Naming things is not something I am apt in.”*

*“Haha. Of course…” the first laughed whole heartedly at some joke she did not understand.*

*“It was decided just recently actually. Her name is Justeaze.”*

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