

IMPERIAL RED

MARCH 2020 REQUEST STORY

BY CHALDEACHANGE



“A video game? I suppose it isn’t a typical use of my time, but with all of my work for the summer finished up...” Mitsuru Kirijo eyed a video game console in the corner of her entertainment room. The heiress of the Kirijo estate and a member of SEES, it wasn’t often she’d even consider doing something as trivial as playing a video game, but as of late she’d found herself with less to do than she’d expected.

Her summer homework had been easy, but it seemed like the other members of SEES were tied up with their own business during the day and only made room for the Midnight Hour at night. Junpei had left her both the console and the game with a recommendation from Akihiko, suggesting that she’d really like the premise. *“One of the characters even sounds like you!”*, they’d told her. That comment, at the very least, had made her just the slightest bit interested.

It took her a little while to figure out how to plug the system into her television. There were a lot of inputs and cables she wasn’t really familiar with, but at the very least they were clearly marked enough that it didn’t take an *excessive* amount of time.

Legs crossed, one over the other, she rested her behind in her reclining chair with a controller in hand as Mitsuru started up the game. There was a short cutscene in the beginning depicting a war or something of that nature, but then the title screen appeared. *“Three Houses”*, it read. *“Development not final”*? Had Junpei and Akihiko given her an unfinished game? How was it even possible that they’d managed to obtain something like this?

Still, she trusted that their claims had some merit. At the very least she wished to see which character sounded like her. There was no way they *had* her voice of course, and so she assumed that her friends had meant along the lines of the character sharing her demeanor. That was the initial thought, but in the middle of the prologue stage there was a girl with hair of white and a voice to rival Mitsuru's own. **"The similarity is uncanny, but I suppose the chance that a voice actress somewhere in Japan might have a voice like my own isn't 0%."** Thinking logically that was true, and she was content leaving it at that.

Fate, on the other hand, did not agree.

BZZZZZZZZZZZZT.

"Hm? WHA--!?"

Darkness.

The sound of rain pounding against what sounded to be a tarp or tent was what ultimately stirred Mitsuru from an unintended slumber. At first she was disoriented and uncertain, and when eyes flickered open they were met with added confusion. She was not laying in her chair nor her bed, she instead was laying upon a cot in a lit tent. Not the kind of tent one might expect for camp, mind you, but the type one often saw as a set piece in military fantasy. It was temporary lodgings for people on the move in an era where cars didn't exist and civilization didn't at all.

"Where...? How?" Last she recalled she'd been playing Three Houses and deliberating the uncanny voice of the character named Edelgard, and then... had she been shocked by the controller? Her memories stopped after that. Had she been kidnapped?

Wind rattled the green tent she was staying in, a lit torch in the large space's center the only source of light for her eyes since it seemed to be late at night, the storm notwithstanding. The teen cast the cover from her body and stood on her feet, bare toes ultimately sinking into the damp earth below since the tent had no floor. **"Why am I naked?"** With the sheet removed it was clear she wasn't dressed. Her naked body was caught by the flicker of the torch, though thankfully there didn't seem to be anyone else inside and the front tent flap had been crossed shut.

Could it have been the work of the Shadows? A trick of the Midnight Hour? But the little light that flickered in through the fluttering flap didn't suggest she was in that cursed time. Mitsuru sighed. She didn't

have enough information but she had to proceed. Trudging across the soil she peered into a back nestled in the tent's corner. Within was what she'd expected: an outfit. The colors consisted of striking reds and daunting blacks, and at a glance it seemed vaguely familiar. Much like the garments adorned by the woman in that game, the one that shared her voice.

“These are Edelgard’s clothes? Nonsense. That was a video game, and this is clearly real.” The smell of the rain, the dampness in the air, the cool wind that ducked beneath the tent -- all of it felt authentic, and so there was no doubt in her mind that this was authentic. **“Even the pain feels real... Hold on, *pain*?”**

It wasn't severe but there was a strangely warm pain spreading through her body. Almost like her blood itself was alive with discomfort, a flame lit that slid through her arteries and her beating heart. Almost like a power once incompatible with her had been planted, and with the arrival of that power came the feeling of something crawling across her body. Goosebumps? They were, of a sort. It wasn't a sensation that plagued her hands nor her face, but she could feel the surface of her skin elsewhere squirming.

A lot of it remained untouched at first, yet looking down at her own flesh Mitsuru began to see inconsistencies that accompanied a more focused aching. Her skin had begun to flare up in some places while indenting in others. It was in patches across her arms, some jagged lines across her breasts, and by running fingers across her tummy and legs she could feel similar markings. All of them ached, some more than others. **“Scars!?”** The realization made the high school student queasy. To obtain scars like these one must first be wounded -- a lot -- and to her knowledge she'd never suffered through such an ordeal.

Nor could they appear so quickly.

Contrasting the fact that her body now felt like it had been lit aflame as her unexpected blood transfusion so that she might sport a Crest came to life, the color of her skin rapidly deteriorated. Mitsuru had always possessed a healthy glow, but she was becoming almost as white as a sheet in between scarred skin. The more she observed the scars the more some looked like they might have been from swords or burns, but others looked too malformed, too unnatural. Like... **“What are these memories!? A basement...!?”** Fingers of both hands dug into the young woman's skull as recollections stirred.

They were things Mitsuru knew she'd never experienced before. The darkness of a basement, the haunting voices of fear of people she identified as family. Torture... and endless torture from which she'd

though she would never escape. It moved Mitsuru to tears but it also instilled an anger in her that she wouldn't soon forget.

While fingers dug into her head, the crimson hair around them began to become not only straighter in design but coarser in quality, as if it had never been washed by modern shampoo nor conditioner. Strands of ghostly white stuck out much akin to the color of her scarred skin, and before long it was entirely engulfed as it cascaded even farther past her rear than it had before.

“Edelgard...? These are her memories? But how?” She'd recalled a name midst it all, one that made her certain it was her own. Even as the Japanese woman was speaking she was looking less and less like her birth race as facial features bent and narrowed. Lips pursed, their volume halved, and eyes that sported an almond design under normal circumstance had become round and, more importantly, the colors of her irises a pale purple. She was looking more Western, more befitting of a name like Edelgard than Mitsuru.

It wasn't that easy to see but she was getting a little shorter as well. The strange feeling across her skin hadn't lessened, but now it felt like something was beginning to bubble up from beneath the bulk of it. Muscles rose in her arms, across her stomach, along her legs. They made her look for more ripped than she'd been as a rapier wielder, almost like she preferred a heavy weapon like an axe.

Well she *did*, didn't she? Her preferences were updating according to Edelgard's personality at a chilling pace. The tent might as well have been swirling around her, feet now slightly smaller than the indents they'd left in the soil below. Her proportions weren't altered drastically, though her chest had birthed a little excess weight while her rear was tighter than it had been before. When it came to the color of her hair even her pubes hadn't been spared the fate of becoming snow white.

Mitsuru -- *Edelgard?* -- was left utterly confused. This tent was... where she was staying after being rescued by that mercenary? Her home was the Adrestian Empire? No, she was from Japan wasn't she?

“Japan? Is that on any map?” It felt so ridiculous to ask herself that aloud because she knew it wasn't. But if anything had remained constant throughout it all, it had been the woman's voice. **“Strange, perhaps I had a bad dream? Though I suppose almost dying might stir up some unpleasant memories...”** Like thinking about her life as a test subject or the deaths of her brothers and sisters.

Something still didn't feel quite right, but she supposed the proper thing to do would be to go back to sleep. But she ran her fingers across the

scars of her body one final time. They would serve as a reminder of why she had to become Emperor.

And of the steps she'd have to take in the future.