

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

This chapter took me quite long between rewrites, me writing a special story, and finally starting to write an original work I had my head fixed on for some time, who knows I might publish my own book someday!

That said, thank you for your patience, and without further ado, enjoy the chapter!

THIS CHAPTER HAS NOT BEEN BETAED YET! (I will upload the betaed chapter as soon as I get it!)

Chapter 51: A Diverging Path

A powerful piercing attack went right through one of the training dummies in the courtyard, its power was so great that the blade managed to sheath itself almost completely in the thick stone wall directly behind the dummy.

A powerful strike few could boast about, and yet, she felt weaker than ever before, not even at her lowest, when all she could do was barely walk straight, even then she didn't feel as weak as now. She was just a joke of a knight, disgraced and worthless...

She thought herself mighty once! When her spear could shatter shields and run through ogres! Now her strikes were even stronger but her mind had never been weaker.

She swore an oath, to the one who helped her when no one would, to the one who was not afraid of her curse and did not just pity her, to the one who brought her cure and release from that hell.

She swore to protect her, to repay the debt she owed her. A life for a life. Reclaim her honor as a knight, what a fool she had been... so fixated on healing the wounds on her body that she forgot of the ones in her mind.

What need did she have of power if her mind was too feeble to use it?

She had her occasion, when her lady tried to parlay with the savage demi-humans and was attacked. She had the occasion of saving her, repaying her long overdue debt, and she failed... no, scratch that, she did not only fail, she disgraced herself in the worst possible way a knight could.

She froze up in cowardice.

Fear for what could happen if she interfered. She had no idea if those Quagoa could curse someone with those claws of theirs, and the mere possibility of it just terrified her to the point of freezing up in place.

She was a fool, unworthy of the gifts she had been granted, a coward proclaiming herself a knight. A fake and a fraud.

Repaying her debt? For all she knew, what she did warranted another debt altogether.

she was an attack dog that shivered in fear at the mere possibility of being severely hurt.

She should just beg for forgiveness and leave her post with the feeble strand of dignity she still had for herself.

And yet, she felt like running away would be the last straw toward utter failure.

“Leinas.”

The blond knight turned immediately as that familiar voice called for her.

There, standing proud and bruised was her lady.

“M-lady Lakyus, h-how did you end up like that?”

She asked half shocked by the numerous bruises on her lady’s face.

“Oh, these? Yeah... it was a lot worse before I healed myself... guess Lin is not a pushover...”

That name brought foul memories back to Leinas, she had never been as humiliated as the time she had crossed blades with that so called explorer. But powerful or not, she would not stand for that woman getting her hands over her lady no matter what!

“I am going to talk to her.”

Her bite was apparently clear in her usually cold stone as the younger blonde immediately proceeded to block her way.

“Wait! Wait! Wait! I asked for her to help me with this! There is no need for an argument!”

She protested against Leinas’ actions. The knight stopped in her tracks, did lady Lakyus just say she was training with the black

monster? That was... something she usually did with her, the knowledge that her lady changed sparring partner didn't feel right in some way.

“I see... you could have asked for my help, I wouldn't have let this happen to you, my lady.”

She said trying to convince Lakyus to change her mind about training with that other woman.

Lakyus looked sheepish for a moment before answering.

“Well... I needed this and she was the only one capable of delivering it as it should...”

Leinas felt a pang of shame and jealousy at the thought. She couldn't fault her lady for thinking her inadequate, not after she failed her so many times in a row. Though she still felt a cold grasp get tighter around her heart. Was Lakyus about to dismiss her services? She wouldn't be surprised, that would not make it any less shameful though.

“I know you are far too gentle of a person to help me with that.”

The younger noble beamed at her with a small smile.

There was no way, there just was no way Leinas heard her right. She could not just have said what she thought she did. Leinas was not gentle, nor was she kind, hell, the first time the two of them met she would have gladly taken Lakyus' head if it would have healed her curse.

She was not beyond taking a life, she was just too much of a coward to risk her own.

“I also wanted to apologize for what I told you that time, it is okay if you don't believe in my dream, I don't want to force anyone to

join me... though, I am grateful for all the times you stuck by my side and helped me.”

‘Stop it! Please just stop!’ the knight could not help but beg her lady to stop speaking, her usual façade was crumbling, and she couldn’t help it. Never, in her entire life, had she met a person so pure and kind, that only wanted to help other for no other reason than to stop suffering.

With every words she spoke Leinas felt a thousand time more worthless and unworthy of remaining by her side.

‘Am I not the most pathetic of knights? Killer, oathbreaker, cursed and unable to repay her debts... am I even a knight at all anymore?’ she felt the little sense of worth remaining in her heart crumble into nothingness.

“L-Leinas, why are you crying... d-did I say something?”

The words of the blonde child, no! The blonde Knight in front of her reached her mind like they were spoken faraway, in a land she could never reach no matter the strength she held.

She did not even notice that her eyes had started leaking, the last time she had cried had been when her curse was lifted and she entered the service of her lady. Who would have guessed that the next time she would, it would be the same time she left her post, broken and without prospects.

Was her life a giant joke for the gods? To lift her curse just to fall into an even deeper despair at the realization of her own self-worthlessness? To show her what a true Knight was? She just knew that if their roles were reversed and Lakyus was the one cursed she would just shrug it off with a smile, she would not lose herself to her hatred and instead continue to pursue her goals, that

was just the kind of person she was. The only one of her kind existing in this accursed world.

And, as this realization downed on her, she could do nothing more than cry like a child who realized that no matter how tall they grew, they would never touch the sun.

{That night}

{Renner's P.O.V.}

This was enough, this was all her patience could take before she snapped, this situation had gone too far and she should have murdered the idea in its crib.

She had been too lenient, too permissive, even a cute puppy could turn into a savage beast if left unchecked or with too much of a long leash.

And this was how it all ended up, a uncontrollable and unpredictable beast hellbent on doing whatever she wanted, with no understanding of the consequences.

“Are you satisfied now?”

It took all she had to not spit those words with as much venom as she could. She left the silence go on just long enough to understand she would not get an answer.

“At least have the decency to speak to me Lakyus...”

Her fiery gaze met with the down-casted one of the blonde knight.

“Do you have any idea of the repercussion of your words? We are to leave in a few days and you just had to open your mouth and make such boisterous claims.”

She continued.

“I made my choice of my own accord... I didn't intend for it to include anyone but me.”

The green eyed noble protested her words.

“You are barely 13!”

The princess could feel her tone heating up, gods, she hated not being in control of her own emotions.

“And you are almost 10!”

Her only friend rebutted.

“I'm not the one making idiotic decisions right now... do you even know what war is? You would die the first moment you found yourself tired or unguarded! And for what? To help someone that we do not know and brings no advantages in helping.”

Renner knew she should not have indulged Lakyus, she knew she should have made the girl sit down the first time she began spewing such nonsense and beat the ridiculous concept out of her if necessary.

She had been too indulgent, too permissive with the cute puppy, just because she turned out to be entertaining, and this was the result.

Even when she tried to avert the disaster and stop Lakyus from uttering those words, Satoru stopped her, and she could not understand why.

He surely did not believe in any of the stuff Lakyus said, Satoru just wasn't that kind of person. So why? Did he have a secret agenda she did not manage to grasp?

“Then why don't you just leave?”

Those words, uttered with such unprecedented emotionless, took Renner aback, a first time for any of her conversations with the young knight during these past years.

She found herself without an answer, that was a first too, what could she say? There was no reason for her to stay, nor there was for Satoru, or Gazef, or anyone really.

They could all leave and nothing would come of it. There was no feasible reason to remain there, stuck into a war that didn't concern them.

And yet, she found herself stuck there, her mind telling her to just leave, her heart aching at the sole thought. She had been betrayed by her own friend, her only friend... no, that was a lie, she had always known who Lakyus was, she made no secret of it... the one who truly betrayed her was her own heart.

The same heart that gave her passion for her Satoru, now ached at the thought of abandoning Lakyus.

The two blondes gazed into each other's eyes.

Those green orbs were so different from the ones of the girl who arrived in her chambers for the first time three years before. That meek and timid puppy was gone, replaced by this determined beast.

“What if I ordered you to not go, to return with us, you are my knight after all.”

She said emotionlessly.

“Then I think it is time for me to give you back your favor and excuse myself from your service.”

Renner gritted her teeth at those words.

“What if I ordered Gazef or Satoru to forcefully bring you back kicking and screaming?”

It was petty, she knew, but it was also the only other thing that came to her mind.

“You wouldn’t dare, I will never forgive you for that!”

The older girl didn’t leave out the bite from her tone.

“So... you value these races, these people we don’t even know, more than our bond? More than our friendship?”

Renner felt something vile rise within her as those words came out of her mouth. She knew it, she knew it! She shouldn’t have left another person into her heart, they would only hurt her again and again, only Satoru, only him could understand her and love her and...

Ah... did her view just become blurrier all of a sudden? She felt something hot crawl down her cheeks... it was wet and left a trail behind it.

Tears, the realization struck her with little anticipation, she was crying.

Her expression did not shift, of that she was sure, she was as stoic as they came. She couldn’t say the same for her internal turmoil.

‘Ah, Lakyus you have done it now...’ she said to herself as she cleaned her face hoping the stream would end soon.

“I... I am sorry... it seems like I can do nothing right these days...”

She felt a gentle hand take out the handkerchief from her hand and begin cleaning her tears away for her as gently as a swordswoman could.

“I just want to prove it to myself, that this dream I have is achievable, to show the world that fantasy can be turned into reality with enough perseverance.”

Lakyus mumbled more to herself than Renner.

“And if I ask you to stop, in the name of our friendship, would you stop then if persevering meant the end of our friendship?”

This was it, the next words would mark what their future relationship will be like, if Lakyus chose to deny her, Renner will close off her heart to her first and only friend forever. And she will never open it up to anyone else apart from Satoru ever again.

“Why are you asking me this? Why can’t I do this and stay your friend?”

The older girl asked in visible discomfort.

“You understand that we cannot leave you here, do you? Satoru has an obligation as your guardian and I will not leave you both here to suffer the consequences of a war that doesn’t concern us... so why Lakyus? why can’t you choose us over your egotistical goals, for just once in your life?!”

She didn’t mean to snap like that, her tongue just slipped, something which she could count on one hand the times it happened.

Fierce blue met pure green as it was the time for Lakyus to began shedding tears.

“Egotistical... you of all people... you did whatever you wanted for your entire life! You call me egotistical?!”

Something had awakened in those green eyes, a fire that wasn't there before. But Renner didn't back down, she got into Lakyus' face, uncaring of the consequences.

“Yes, I am egotistical, but I would never put in danger those who are close to my heart, and that includes you as well... but if you would, then I guess there is no point in continuing this... goodnight, Lady Aindra.”

With her piece said she turned around and slumped into her makeshift bed.

From there no more exchanges happened and she fell asleep alone for the first time since they started their journey, her body yearning for the usual body heat enveloping her, a urge she pushed down no matter the coldness and discomfort.

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

He moved away from the tent, he was not one to usually eavesdrop on others' conversations, though when he heard the two girls argue, he could not help but overhear what they had to say after the meeting with the Commander.

He knew they would have clashed over this, but this was far worse than he thought.

The two were like water and oil, one passionate and rash the other calculative and stoic. That was why their unlikely friendship always fascinated him as they wouldn't have looked out of place in Ainz Ooal Goal. Human race apart of course.

It was just a matter of time before they came to an abrupt disagreement, the same way Touch-Me and Ulbert could not get along for more than a certain amount of time.

It may be his bias as an undead, but he mostly agreed on Renner's side this time. There was no reason for them getting involved in this mess, and it would only put them at risk unnecessarily. Though he could not fully fault neither, they were children after all. No more no less, they just tried to understand the world the best they could.

Yet, it was annoying, seeing a friendship ruined over this. It was such a precious thing for Renner too... she might not want to befriend anyone else after this, he certainly wouldn't if he found himself in such a situation.

He wondered if he could do something about it. The two of them were just too precious of a duo to let them split like this.

“Copper for your thoughts?”

He was so focused on his own musings that he didn't notice the young, black-haired woman he just passed by. ‘Good heavens... why?’ he wondered in exasperation.

“Just the man I was searching for...”

The woman chuckled as she got uncomfortably close to him, disregarding his personal space.

“Here, I took your advice, and I wrote my own little story... would you like to check it?”

She asked the question almost meekly and with a certain shyness that didn't really sit well with her character. Intrigued by the sudden shift, Satoru accepted the small book from her hands and began to read.

The story wasn't really long, just a little over ten pages, it was quite a mundane thing too, just a mother baking sweets for her

daughter, though there was something in the writing that indicated a certain care and undertone to it all.

“So, what do you think?”

She asked once she saw he reached the last page.

“Umu, it is quite raw, but that is expected from a beginner I think... although, you are just able to bring a certain mood to the story which is certainly commendable.”

He decided to offer his honest thoughts on the short story eliciting a smirk from the black-haired explorer as he handed the book back to her.

“Why thank you, those are most kind words, though... for someone who wanted to learn the language you surely seem to have no problem reading it...”

Those words confused the Overlord for a couple instants until he looked back at the book, Japanese kanji staring back at him from the filled pages. He had been played, and he fell for it like an idiot. He berated himself in his own mind for his carelessness around the woman, he was just too overwhelmed by the two blondes’ argument to focus on his actions.

To think he was caught red-handed like this, he was halfway infuriated and annoyed at the woman smirking before him. But he had his own weapon against her, and maybe it was time to fire it, only for the satisfaction of it.

“You are quite eager to find out others’ secrets... you who continue to hide your true nature behind that black curtain.”

His words had the desired result when her smirk fell, replaced by a deep frown.

Silence fell between them for almost a full minute.

“You play a dangerous game, magic caster.”

She hissed, her playful attitude completely gone, finally showing her fangs.

“I could say the same, explorer.”

Satoru had no intention of backing down. He had long passed the time where he was just a meek salaryman, his undead nature and the hardship of this new life had made sure of it.

“Why don’t we settle this in the training ground then?”

She asked savagely, he could almost feel her bloodthirst though, she would be severally disappointed in his inability to bleed.

He was about to shut it down but then an idea popped out in his mind. He wanted to help Renner and Lakyus mend their relationship and the only way he could think of was by using Lakyus’ mindset to do so... but to realize his plan, he would have to give up a big part of his cover. But if he could use her...

‘Once you know what your opponent wants you only have to see how far they will go to get it... that is the true secret to negotiation’ those words were something he knew from his job as a salaryman, not that he ever did much to apply it on the workplace, instead he mostly used that mindset during the good old Yggdrasil days, where their small clan had to walk on eggshells around far bigger fish.

“If you really want to fight me... then I may have an idea... I will give you your fight, but first, you need to help me with a certain task.”

The vicious smirk on the woman's face disappeared, replaced by a curious expression, hell, he could even have called it cute if he wasn't aware of her true self.

“And why should I go along with that and not try to cut your head here and now?”

She asked, that confused puppy look still on her face, it was hard even as an undead to conciliate her expression with her words.

“Well, first, if you did that I would be more on the defensive and try to escape you... which would defeat the purpose of wanting a proper fight... second, I feel like someone like you would enjoy the task I have for you...”

That last part seemed to attract the black-eyed explorer attention as her gaze narrowed on him.

“Oh, that sounds interesting, so tell me... what will you have little old me do?”

She asked as her hand twitched dangerously near the hilt of her halberd.

{Dark Scale Palace}

{Draudillon's P.O.V.}

She refrained from turning her smile into a smirk when the news of a certain swordsman's return reached her ears. Unfortunately, the good mood didn't survive what came next, apparently the blue haired man had a few beastmen accompanying him.

To say the guards had their reservations about letting him through was an understatement, she doubted they could do anything about it even if they wanted to. The only one who could probably at

least challenge the blue-haired swordsman was that little girls loving freak himself.

Not that she would mind if that piece of shit lost his head to the blue-haired man, she would rather deal with a sword-freak battle maniac compared to the pedophile.

“A-announcing Ser Brain Unglus!”

The guard at the door announced with small hesitation. Draudillon shifted on her throne, her tail dangling on one side as usual when she was a little nervous.

The doors of the throne room opened as the stoic blue haired man strolled in, unbothered and uncaring as usual, his light leather armor was as unblemished as when he left, a testament to his apparent success.

Apparent being the key word seeing how two snake like beastmen slithered behind him, they were some of the tallest beings in the room but their meek behavior indicated their apparent discomfort as they stayed as close as possible to the human before them.

They were unarmed, of course, as no one apart from a few could enter the throne room with a weapon, even less if it was a beastman.

“Ser Unglaus, welcome back, I hope your trip was successful?”

She indicated with her eyes the two beastmen as she questioned the man before her who proceeded to openly scowl. He hated the title of knight she invested him with once he returned with the head of the second beastmen leader he killed. It was just a matter of politics and to have his name spread through the masses, after all, seeing someone accomplish that much was a good way to reinvigorate the people’s negative view on the going of the war.

Everyone loved a good hero tale, even more if he seemed devoted to the country, which really he wasn't but she tried her best to make him appear so.

“As I promised, I brought you the head of the Naga clan leader.”

The swordsman had the guts to shrug as he indicated with a glance the demi-human directly behind him. A red-scaled snake like creature that clearly had feminine traits hiding under the cloak covering her upper human half.

“I see, and why, may I ask, is it still attached to her body?”

Draudillon questioned with a dangerous smile on her face.

“She wants to plead with you, and I am not one to kill someone who lost the will to fight... I am past that by now...”

He mumbled the last words as if they were meant more for himself than anyone else.

The Dragon Queen focused her gaze on the hooded figure completely.

“So, let us hear this plea.”

She was already having enough of this. The two figures removed their cloaks revealing their upper human like body, even though calling it human would be a disservice to humanity. It was just uncanny to look at, as if she was looking at her reflection through a cracked mirror.

As expected of demi-humans, they didn't have any modesty and the only thing covering them, now that the cloak was gone, was just a thin looking cloth covering the genital area, or at least when the queen thought their genital would be.

“My name is Mar’raak! Former leader of the Naga clan, descendant of Nagur!”

The red scaled one introduced herself, with all the pride she could muster, making the queen almost deadpan at her own mindlessness, as focused as she was on her attire, or lack thereof, she didn’t notice the numerous scars marking the demi-human’s skin, as well as her lack of an arm.

“I am the younger sister Sha’raak, current leader of the Naga clan, descendant of Nagur!”

The slightly smaller and blue scaled demi-human introduced herself. She seemed to just be in a slightly better shape than her older sister, with still both her arms where they should be.

“We come seeking peace with the humans of these lands.”

The blue-scaled one continued much to the shock of everyone in the room and the cry of outrage of others.

Draudillon slapped her tail on the floor, slightly cracking it and silencing the room as she stood from her throne.

“And why should I even consider this?! Are you perhaps fooling me in trusting you so that you can backstab us at your earliest convenience?!”

She asked imperiously, not that she actually believed her own words, this was no farce, and it was clear, she just needed to assess who she was dealing with, how desperate they were, and what level of intelligence they possessed.

“No! We accept defeat! You are stronger! We plead for peace!”

The demi-human cried out in a panic, her snake-like eyes darting to Brain as if she wanted him to do something.

“I told you I would bring you here to parlay, nothing more... if you fail, you are on your own.”

He said coldly. ‘So, not that intelligent, or at least, not versed into human politics’ the queen assessed in her mind.

“How am I to believe that a beastmen clan who ravaged lands and raided villages is here to ask for peace?! And with which audacity you do so?!”

Some of her generals and ministers loudly agreed with her words as they cried out in indignation at the beastmen.

“W-we are a small clan! We could not refuse the larger ones in joining war! Not the Grand Leaders! We would have been annihilated otherwise!”

The blue-scaled Naga tried to explain herself, not that any cared for their explanation in the first place. There was too much bad blood, death, and suffering to reach any kind of understanding by now.

“I take responsibility for that! As leader, I led my kin to war and ordered the strikes! The fault lies with me! So, take my head if you must, if that is the price for my kin survival, so be it!”

The red-scaled one-armed Naga declared as her serpentine eyes locked with Draudillon’s. There was no deceit in that gaze, the Naga were apparently a very straightforward race as they laid their cards on the table from the beginning without trying any sort of negotiation.

This was a hard decision, on one hand, she could get rid of a small but powerful clan and that would raise morale, on the other, she had no doubt they would fight to the bitter end and cause major damage in the process. Sparing them would also lead to possible

diminishment of the trust placed on her by her generals who would not let this slide.

The queen's eyes darted to Brain, the major cause of her current headache, if only he did his job properly... well, let the choice fall on him then! He deserves as much!

“So, Ser Brain, what do you propose we do? You are certainly the most experienced with this clan, so I would ask for your opinion on the matter.”

She asked refraining from smirking at him and the murderous look he was giving her. The room quieted down as everyone wanted to know what one of their war heroes had to say on the matter.

The swordsman loudly sighed before addressing her directly.

“The matter is quite simple, you can either fight them to the last one and needlessly lose many of your troops in doing so, as I will not help since I have no interest in fighting those inferior or those who don't wish to do so.”

The two demi-humans bowed their heads at his insulting words, a strange thing given the usual pride the beastmen were known for.

“Or, you can make them work for the opportunity to survive, that is really your choice, I have no interest either way.”

The man stated as stoically as usual. At least he put into words her exact thoughts without forcing her to do so.

She closed her eyes for a moment as if contemplating the ideas, even though she already knew what would be best for her country, regardless of what other thought.

“And what assurance do I have that, if I let you go, you wouldn’t attack us at the first occasion?”

She questioned, much to the shock and protests of many in the room.

“We honor our deals! We are proud of our sworn words! To break an agreement would make us no better than mindless beasts! The ultimate dishonor!”

The blue-scaled leader vehemently insisted much to the scorn of many in the room who clearly didn’t believe a single word.

Now it was time to make her play, be it her last, she has to ensure her country’s survival, even at the cost of her crown.

“Very well, Naga clan! I will accept your peace!”

She proclaimed much to the outrage of most of the room whose cries of protest rose like never before.

“SILENCE!”

She demanded slapping her tail multiple times on the floor. The room quieted down quickly.

“You will repay for the death and suffering you brought on this kingdom with your own hands! You will not be allowed within any of our cities, only exception is for your leader if she is summoned directly by me! You will fight for our cause on the battlefield when we ask you to! And, lastly, you will immediately relay all information you have on the beastmen’s army and their leaders to us!”

What she demanded was little better than slavery, but that was the price to pay if they wished to survive. She scanned the room and indeed most protesters quieted down with hatred in their eyes, but

acceptance of her words, still some others clearly wanted to speak up but refrained.

“We swear on our ancestor’s name that we will oblige by these rules, may our agreement be sacred withing these lands, we will fight for you as long as Brain Unglaus do so!”

The blue-scaled demi-human swore her oath making Draudillon quirk an eyebrow at the strange wording.

What did Brain had to do with anything? Judging by the man’s almost annoyed reaction she sensed that there was quite a story behind that.

“Excuse me then, but what exactly is the relationship between you and Ser Brain?”

She asked receiving a killing stare from the blue-haired swordsman.

“Brain Unglaus defeated me and sister in combat alone and spared our lives once we lost consciousness, sparing us after winning a one-on-one battle is a sign of absolute dominance in my clan and we have accepted our new roles as Brain Unglaus’ mates after our defeat.”

The demi-human’s words caused another uproar in the room much to the queen’s amusement and the mentioned swordsman’s clear annoyance.

“I agreed to nothing!”

He protested loud enough to be heard above the crowd.

“It is nature, even if you have yet to claim us, it is imperative that we bring into the world the best possible new generation, with your skills and talent combined with our powerful bloodline, we

will produce the best offsprings the Naga Clan has ever seen since the death of our founder Nagur!”

The red-scaled Naga intervened much to the aggravation of the blue-haired man and further amusement of the dragon queen. ‘Seems like the outcome has been drowned by the drama... you are more useful than I thought Brain Unglaus’ she felt a smirk crawl on her face.

“Please Ser Brain, make sure to seduce as many of the beastmen as you can, we need the numbers.”

She said just loud enough for the addressed man to hear.

Her smirk was met by the most aggravated of killing stares.

A.N.

Man, everyone is getting an harem around here... ok, jokes aside, hope you enjoyed the chapter, I wanted to add another POV but I thought it would fit better in the next chapter.

Stuff is happening and the stage is finally set for what I had planned. Next chapter we will see the beginning of the last part of this arc. Hope you are excited and can't wait to hear your predictions or thoughts!

So, make sure to leave a review / comment!

See you next time! Stay safe!

P.S.

Remember to vote for the Christmas story poll!