

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Awww man, here we are again, I actually wanted to write an action chapter here but found myself overwriting moments between characters, and the worst thing is that in the end I think I still miss something, like dude, you just wrote 7k words of people chatting, get a hold of yourself!

Ramblings aside, thank you for your patience, this last period is a mess, first I hurt my hand, now I fall and hurt my ribs, what's next?

Well, just ignore me and enjoy the chapter!

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

Chapter 54: Friends

The woman hummed a tune as she dodged the lightning infused blade before delivering a kick to her now open opponent. The blonde girl actually managed to shift and absorb most of the strength of her strike by using her arms and movement. She almost felt like grinning at the sight. There was no denying this

girl was truly a raw diamond, in just a few hours of exchange she already managed to anticipate her moves.

Well, she wasn't going all out of course, else these spars would not last more than the time it took her to close the distance between them. But still, the explorer known as Lin found herself enjoying this, nonetheless. It reminded her of when she kicked all those brats' ass.

When they began the girl's stance was good, but it was clear it was just a well-executed copy of someone else's style. Lin tried to have her create her own style, but it was still too soon apparently as the few attempts resulted in amateurish results at best and terrible at worse.

The good thing was that the wannabe knight no longer froze every time she leaked some of her killing intent at her.

“What? Already done?”

She questioned as the blonde girl planted her blade in the ground as she did every time she was done. Still, it was a good bit earlier than usual.

“I-I have a meeting to a-attend.”

The girl panted out as she sat on the cold ground to stabilize her heavy breathing.

“A meeting you say... and do you intend to go like that?”

The woman questioned, amused at the prospect, this reminded her somehow of her own attitude during her youth.

“What is wrong with what I have now?”

That innocent question brought out a chuckle from Lin's lips which curved up in a genuine smile. The blonde was disheveled, dressed in dirtied armor, and covered in sweat.

“Run along then, I have my own thing to do.”

She gestured for the girl to run off which she did immediately.

Lin untied her black hair, as they flowed down her back one strand caught her attention, her hand immediately snapped and caught the offending hair in her grasp.

She looked down with a resigned frown at the few grey hair mixed in with the other black ones.

“Well, it should have been expected after a while.”

She muttered to herself as she released her grasp letting the strand fall down alongside the others.

‘Well, that ruined the mood’ she thought depressingly as she reached for the hidden pouch in her leather armor taking out her precious journal turned storybook.

She found the art of writing relaxing, to let the mind wonder in unexplored and nonsensical realms, something she sought most of her life for. She was even willing to admit it was a challenge for once! Something she was not suddenly good at or gifted in, practice made perfect and she practiced a lot.

She still, of course, wrote of her travel, the people she met and her thoughts and hypothesis. But since that man instilled the idea, she began to write of impossible lands and naïve heroes bent on saving them. Or of endless tales of misery and how reality often crushed the unprepared and unwanted. Or how people found solace in the mundane and pacific lullaby of a tranquil life.

Truly, that was a ever-expanding realm only her mind knew the bounds of.

But enough about her new hobby, the truly important thing was getting to know the man, no, the monster behind the mask. She never had doubts about the magical prowess the man was rumored to have, but seeing it was still breathtaking. Not that she never saw such power before, far from it, but there was a certain way he was wielding his spells, as if this was nothing more than a chore... something that reminded her of her own attitude toward battle.

If it was anybody else, she would be more cautious with hazarding such an hypothesis, but the man was cunning, he certainly didn't go all out on the behalf of these dwarves, no... that little spectacle could be considered putting up an effort at best.

And still, the proficiency in which he wielded his spells was something she never saw, not even among the best casters she knew.

He was also one of the few who knew of her secret, that, she didn't like. Not that she bothered to hide it much considering concealment magic was out of the question for obvious reasons.

Though, she got a very juicy information to unravel the mystery that was Satoru. He knew how to read the language of the Gods proficiently, that was a skill few in the Theocracy had the pleasure of boasting about. So, he either was a fugitive, unlikely, or he had learned it elsewhere... a certain Floating City came to mind, but that would also mean he was an envoy of the Dragon Lord.

That was quite the stretch, she saw how he acted, she heard rumors of what he did, that senile lizard didn't have enough balls to act so directly.

Though, if he wasn't from the Theocracy and he wasn't working for the lizard, which side was he on? What could possibly come from helping the Re-Estize Kingdom? It surely put a wrench in the wheels of the Theocracy who wanted nothing more than to create a unique human front. But the caster never showed any antagonism toward Slane ever since she met him.

Well, she was intrigued now to say the least, she would enjoy unraveling the living dilemma that was Satoru, the Gods knew she could use some excitement in her life.

Now... what would her next story be about?

{Arche's P.O.V.}

The blonde noble casted her fire spell, though it was no use as the barrier of ice shielding her target was too powerful.

“Shit.”

She muttered under her breath. If only her parents could see her now... they would probably have a stroke, she was sweaty, panting, and completely disheveled. She resembled more a street rat than the noble heir of the Furt family at the moment. But that was the last of her concerns right now, magic was not a parlor trick to use to impress at noble gatherings! It was a perfectionist art, like Master Satoru told them.

“Get away!”

She heard someone scream before she was pushed out of the way by her fellow apprentice. She almost screamed at him for pushing her to the ground and dirtying the magnificent robes their master gifted them, but then she realized what had just happened.

Her spell might not have been enough to penetrate the ice but it was enough to melt some of it. That action had the unfortunate consequence of bringing down a column of ice thrice her size that would have crushed her if it wasn't for the intervention of Rayne.

"T-thank you."

She muttered, her eyes still fixed on the ice column that would have crushed her if it wasn't for the boy currently lying on top of her.

Their eyes met, sky blue into grass green, she never noticed how intense his eye color actually was, it was kind of... mesmerizing.

"Hey! Are you two okay?!"

That weird moment was interrupted by their sparring partner running their way. Rayne rolled off of her swiftly and stood up.

"Y-Yes! Don't worry! I-I think we are both okay, right Arche?"

He said in one single breath, a sign she learnt to associate with him being embarrassed. He offered her his hand which she accepted.

"Sorry about that, I should have been more careful."

Apologized the lizardman known as Zaryusu.

"No, it is fine, accidents happen."

Raye said as Arche nodded in agreement. They were the ones who asked the lizardman to spar and don't hold back. They both agreed that it was about time they began experiencing battle, if they wanted to embark on the same path as their master, this was the right way to go.

They both were scare at the prospect, the night after the battle they slept back to back to comfort each other. It was frightening to see Master Satoru wield his magical prowess to take countless lives. Be it deserved or not. She knew that her master did not shy away from violence, the Noble Purge was a clear wake up call if anyone thought otherwise. But hearing of it was a thing and seeing it with her own eyes was another.

“Still, I think we should take a break.”

The lizardman continued, Rayne agreed for them both.

That was another conundrum all in its own. Arche never had much of an opinion on other races, the most she had seen before leaving the Empire was the random elf slave and nothing more.

She was taught that other races were just barbaric brutes, inferior being if compared to the greatness of humanity. She just accepted that as a fact and never gave it much of a thought.

Then she saw Go Gin, the war troll, a massive figure who could have been considered the embodiment of the word strength. And yet, even such a mighty foe was brought low by the power of a single human. This did nothing but reinforce those teachings.

But a year after that, she met the lizardmen. Sure, they were considerable brutish in their ways, their technology was not comparable with what she was used to,, but she never, not even once, did they show themselves inferior to humans.

They had their customs and their way of life. Their low numbers and precarious conditions didn't allow them to grow much as a society or a race, but they still carried themselves with pride and

could hold a conversation even better than some humans she met before.

She was sure that they had the potential to grow and reach a societal level comparable to the human one if given the chance and resources.

“I think you should get Lakyus to heal you up.”

Her musings were interrupted by the voice of the boy she grew to be accustomed to.

She glanced at him and almost rolled her eyes at the irony.

“Said the one with the bleeding cheek.”

At her comment he immediately brought down his hand to check on his face, though, that was the moment they both noticed their hands were still linked. They both stopped and looked at their hands, Arche did not notice it till that moment but now she was painfully aware of her free hand being freezing cold while the other was pleasantly warm.

They both let go of each other's appendices at the same time and averted eye contact. Arche herself didn't know why this was, she never had a problem holding hands with the few people she had to, this wasn't even the first time she did it with a boy!

Back in the academy, she had once gone strolling around a garden with a boy she thought handsome at the time. They held hands as it was acceptable in noble society, but she never felt as uncomfortable or embarrassed as she felt now.

“Ah, I finally found you two!”

The loud voice made both students jump out of their boots in surprise.

They both turned to look at the approaching form of Lakyus, she seemed as fresh from a spar as they were.

“We have been summoned by the Council for a meeting... well, Satoru was, really... but he insisted we come too!”

The older noble explained prompting a sigh from Arche. For all she liked Lakyus and admired her, the older girl had as much aware for noble etiquette as Rayne did.

“[Clean]”

The blonde caster intoned her spell while pointing her staff at the older girl.

“Here, you should be at least presentable this way...”

Arche said in exasperation before using the same spell on herself while she heard Rayne do the same from her left.

They both have joined forces learning that spell once they understood how useful it was to clean oneself while traveling, another insight their master gave them. She wasn't used to filth of any kind, and while Rayne had been more tolerable with being dirty, even he had a breaking point. That was actually the first thing they learnt together to minimize time.

“Did you cut yourself?”

Asked Lakyus as she adjusted as much as she could her disheveled hair.

“Ah, uhm, we were sparring...”

The boy explained before a green glowing hand found itself on his injured cheek.

“[Light Heal]”

The effect was immediate as the wound closed and all that remained was to clean off the blood.

“Here... stay still...”

Arche said exasperatedly as she grabbed the boy’s face and proceeded to clean off the drying blood.

“Stay still!”

She ordered as the boy quivered under her touch, she grasped his face firmly between her hands.

She quickly wiped off the remaining blood, she noticed with some curiosity how where the cut was a small scratch still remained, barely visible to the naked eye. Weird, usually Lakyus’ spells never failed to completely clean off any minor damage.

“Are you done?”

Her thought was interrupted by his voice, she noticed that she had finished for a while and was just holding his face now, fixed as she was on that small scratch.

She let him go with some hesitation before turning toward the older girl.

“C’mon, let’s go, we can’t have them wait any longer.”

[Renner's P.O.V.]

She sighed contently as she felt that familiar metallic hand ruffling her hair with all the affection she wished in the world. Satoru was truly the best when it came to improving her mood.

"Yesterday i heard you and Lakyus talk, it didn't seem like it was a pleasant conversation, would you mind to share what it all was about?"

He asked much to her discomfort, that wasn't something she wished to talk about, it hurt her more than she wanted to admit to refuse Lakyus like that, but she made her choice, she choose her selfishness over their friendship and so Renner didn't feel like behaving like a friend anymore. That was only logical in her mind, she didn't have any obligations toward her! She didn't have to waste time helping her solve all her self-imposed problems! She was a selfish puppy who decided to bite off the hand that fed her!

If only she could convince herself of such easy lies... but alas, she was a woman of logic and she refused to accept anything but the truth, no matter how hurtful that truth might be.

"I don't want to talk about it."

She whispered while involuntarily curling up into a ball... damn it! Now she just looked like a hopeless child! She also had no idea why in the world she just didn't tell Satoru what her dilemma was, he could help her as he always had, everything got better once she spoke about it with Satoru. Though, the words just wouldn't leave her throat, as if this was something sacred she had to keep between her and Lakyus, an utterly foolish, illogical, and emotional reaction if she ever saw one. She must look like such an utter fool...

She didn't even feel the tears prickling at the side of her eyes, she just knew that at some point she had begun to cry, a silent cry unbroken by any sobs or shudders. A final purge of all the pain this ordeal had caused her.

"Here, here, have this."

She heard the gentle voice of her beloved as something white entered her peripheral view, it took a few seconds for her blurred eyes to realize that foreign object was a handkerchief.

She began to clean herself up, partially ashamed of her childish behavior but, then again, this was the last time she would cry for her former friend. This was the last time she would allow herself to have a friend to begin with. it was just a waste of time and emotions, this was a weakness she would not allow herself to have.

"I-I am sorry."

She had no idea why or to whom she spoke those words, apologizing was just a foreign thing to her... only fools apologized for real since that meant they had committed an error so great, they were forced into submission by their opponent.

"It hurts so much."

That was true at least, she really hurt a lot inside her, though, she had no idea why she told Satoru. She didn't want him to think she was a weakling incapable of controlling herself.

"I understand, let it all out."

Even though his tone was as emotionless as always, she could not help but feel the slight endearment and gentleness hidden within his voice. She snuggled into him, that was the only position she

felt absolutely safe in, the only place she could be herself and enjoy her love without anyone seeing it.

"Lakyus wanted me to help her with her stupid thing... i said no, we argued... again."

She said, there was no need for anything else, that was the core of it and the only thing that really mattered, details were useless right now.

"Umu, i see, and why don't you want to help your friend?"

Coming from anyone else, she would consider that an idiotic question, but Satoru did not ask idiotic question, ever! So, there was surely a point he was trying to make there, she was just not seeing it yet.

"She is not! My! Friend! Anymore!"

She felt her emotions flare once more giving her words more bite she did not mean to use when talking with Satoru. She took a deep breath to calm herself, a task she found harder and harder as time passed apparently.

"She is an idiot who doesn't understand or care about the harm her actions may cause to others around her."

She explained more calmly as she took a deep breath to take in as much of his smell as she could, that slight odor of sulfur and something sweet she could not grasp, always managed to calm her and make her muscles and mind relax.

"I see what you mean, her mindset certainly creates some problems here and there."

That was a great understatement on Satoru's part if the princess ever heard one. She could not grasp if Satoru just really didn't care

much for Lakyus' interference as much as she thought he did or he was planning something which was unaffected by her actions, though, she didn't see how this last one could be right. Lakyus managed to jeopardize their relationship with every other party in this conflict, what kind of plan would not be affected by this?

"Have you explained it to her?"

That question stopped her in her tracks, she raised her head to look at him.

"Of course, I did, i told her as much the first time she did so, she didn't listen and did it again and again!"

She almost felt betrayed at that, she certainly vocalized her concerns to Lakyus, it wasn't like she pretended everything was fine, and the fact Satoru doubted her was hurtful.

"Yes, but did you explain why to her? Did you explain what consequences her actions had and why that was?"

No, that she did not, and she had no reason to as well! Lakyus didn't have the mind to understand such things to their core, she was just supposed to listen to Renner and obey, for the princess knew what was best.

"No, i have no reason to do so, she would not understand."

She answered calmly as if stating just an objective truth of the world they lived in.

"Is that so? How can you be so sure of that?"

Satoru asked as he removed his comforting hand from her head much to her displeasure.

"Let me ask you this, if you ever found yourself in need of fighting undead and had to choose between a sword, a bow, and a mace, what would you choose?"

He asked much to Renner's confusion, she had no idea what his had to do with their conversation. Though, before she could answer, Satoru continued his explanation.

"Of course, Lakyus would tell you to choose the mace, but would you know why that was? Would it even be useful to tell you that without explaining why and how that weapon should be used?"

The magic caster asked as the princess began to understand what he was trying to imply.

"If you met an ogre next, would you be able to choose the best weapon without any help? Or would you be as lost as before without understanding which side you should approach the problem from?"

She paused at that, his words looped into her mind as the meaning behind them was assimilated. She, of course, knew that her and Lakyus's thought processes were different and so they were both gifted in different areas regarding life. Though, she didn't ever ponder how different their approach to said thought process was. Renner never thought it would make any sense explaining things to Lakyus since she could not make up or execute them by herself, but that didn't mean she could not understand the reasoning behind them. She was so used to work with people who would just understand her with little to no explanation that she just thought everyone else incompetent on those matters.

But then again, she never tested Lakyus' capability of understanding what she was doing in its totality.

“Do you really think... that would suffice?”

She asked, doubting him for the first time ever since he lit that fire within her.

“Don’t you want to be friends with her?”

That was the true question, wasn’t it? Renner would have denied to everybody else, her pride would have not allowed her to admit her desires to anyone. But Satoru wasn’t just anyone, and the pain she had pushed down and drowned inside her laid her real feelings bare to witness.

“Shit.”

She never cursed out loud, and even this time, it was barely a whisper, but she couldn’t help and externalize her frustration.

“Language.”

The deep dark voice of her beloved chastised her prompting her to almost bite her tongue in repentance.

“I want to be friends.”

She admitted before she slapped a hand over her mouth. She didn’t want to say it like that, sounding so pathetic, like a needy child. She cursed her own mental weakness, what would Satoru think of her? Seeing her in this state, like a complete mess. She almost felt like she was about to cry... oh, damn it, where those tears she was gathering in her eyes? Was she really about to cry?

‘Don’!! Stop it you idiot! Don’t cry! STOP IT!’ she tried to stop herself but then she felt a gentle velvety arm wrap around her, while a cold hand soothingly caressed her head.

“It’s okay, let it all out.”

The dam broke and streams of tears began to flow down her face, traitors, all of them! But it felt good, the pain in her chest was still there, but with every tear it was like she was slowly draining the flood stuck inside her.

“I have been very cross once, with a very close friend of mine, I felt like he betrayed me in a way, but he also had his reasons to do what he did, that I agreed or not with them was not the point... he was his own person and could decide for himself.”

She heard him begin one of his stories, she wasn't usually to enthusiastic about them like Lakyus was, but she enjoyed spending time with him nonetheless and she could hear the happiness he radiated from his every word when he spoke of his old friends.

She had been quite envious in the past at the thought of there being more people occupying Satoru's heart than just her. But then again, he had an entire life he had lived before meeting her, so she just accepted it with a grain of salt.

“We didn't talk to each other for quite some time in that occasion, a childish behavior in hindsight, in the end, we sat down and explained each other... we explored each other's motives and by the end of it we understood each other better than ever before, our friendship was deepened by the experience.”

He explained as his soothing words and gestures calmed her down. She began to clean herself a second time with the white handkerchief.

“W-what did you a-argue about?”

She asked, curious to know what could possibly get under the skin of a calm and resolute person such as Satoru.

“Ah... umu... it was, well, he bought from a merchant I very much hated at the time...”

He explained with some hesitation in his tone.

That revelation just stunned her into silence. That was... incredibly petty, she never would have expected for someone like Satoru to get stuck on such trivial things.

“Well the bizarre part is... that at some point I began to buy from them as well...”

He told with a straight tone of voice as if he was just retelling the events of yesterday.

Renner could not help but begin to giggle, the situation was absurd and not at all what she would have expected from someone as usually serious as Satoru.

“Well, you don’t have to laugh at my youthful foolishness like that, my pride might get hurt.”

He said, clearly feigning taking offense at her words. That actually only elicited more giggles from the blonde princess who just could not imagine a silly younger Satoru getting in stupid arguments.

And just like that, he managed to switch her from inconsolable to amused and cheerful. ‘Is there nothing you can’t do, my Satoru?’ she wondered as her affection grew ever more even though she didn’t believe such a thing possible.

She had woken up resigned and now she was hopeful. If she didn’t know better, she would have called Satoru a magic caster only for managing that.

And that is why she would heed his advice, his words of wisdom he bestowed upon her, she will do her best, for Lakyus was her friend and she will not let anything get between the two of them. Even if she had to uproot one or two races in the process.

{That evening}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

“Well, that was quite a mess.”

Said the magic caster as he slipped a mug of beer toward the Warrior Captain who readily caught it and gulped it down immediately. Apparently, the news was received by him just as badly.

“Satoru, don't tell me you are going to accept the challenge, it is madness, and I am sure you know it too, if I ever knew something about you is that you would not rush into this kind of things.”

Gazef said as he slammed down the mug with more strength than the action required.

“I would say you know me well... and indeed, I am in no mood of playing these childish games.”

He confirmed the other man's words. The Regency Council's meeting had completely caught him by surprise if he could say so, he expected just to receive an answer to his request of having a few runecraft blacksmiths to come back with him, instead, apparently earlier in the day the Quagoa approached the city and announced the challenge of their King to have a one on one to decide the fate of the war.

The Regency Council had almost begged him to fight, they offered him the blacksmiths he wanted and even some quite rare

materials. That really tingled his businessman's senses, but he knew better than get knee deep into the mess which are politics... again.

It had been a fun journey, and that is all it would be, though he really had no idea how to turn the offer down in a polite way. Well, he knew how, but he was a representative of the Re-Estize's court now, he couldn't just say no, turn around, and walk away. Luckily for him, there was someone who outranked him here... the little devil, Renner, she could certainly get him out of this mess and not cause an international incident.

He felt a little bad for using her like this, she was a child after all, but he just tried to think of it as payment for the emotional support he provided her earlier... well, that sounded even scummier... god damn it!

He refrained from facepalming at his own thoughts.

“Glad to hear it, I feared your greed would get the better of you.”

The Warrior Captain uttered in relief.

“Umu, a true businessman always knows when a gamble is worth it and when it is just a recipe for disaster.”

He said waving the matter away as if it was just an annoying bug.

“Though, you know the final decision is not mine, after all... a princess always outrank a mere marquis.”

He said half-jokingly half-serious. Gazef just smiled.

“Eh, if I didn't know any better it might sound like you are trying to shift your duties as a noble on a child's shoulders.”

He rebutted as he sipped his newly filled mug with far less aggression than the last one.

“What can I say... everyone must have their trials in their lives, I am sure the princess will make the right choice.”

The masked undead said with surety in his tone.

“Sometimes I think that all these rules are stupid, you know Satoru?”

The Warrior Captain almost whispered gaining the caster’s attention as he sounded far more serious than before.

“The hierarchy?”

He asked perplexed, Gazef just shook his head.

“Not only that, but... why should be the eldest child to inherit the throne? Is age truly all that matters when it comes to being a ruler? All her half-siblings combined could not even come close to what the princess has already done for the kingdom in such few years.”

He admitted looking around as if he expected someone to spy on them and overhear their conversation.

“Umu, I see what you mean, I am not sure the princess would be thrilled at the prospect of ruling, but I certainly see the appeal of having someone like her in charge.”

Satoru admitted, and he was being sincere. For all he joked around with the concept, Renner really was a genius like few were ever born. She alone had played her cards so well that she singlehandedly put down a ongoing rebellion that would escalate into open civil war if not an invasion. Well, he lent her a hand... but really, most of the work was done in the empire while he was just messing around and having fun. In hindsight, he must have looked quite the fool in that occasion, oblivious to all that was going on around him.

Normally being outsmarted and even slightly manipulated by a prepubescent girl would be humiliating, but Renner was Renner and it could not be helped. The fact the girl reminded him of himself had nothing to do with his biased opinion of course!

“Well, I guess part of the credit for that would have to be given to you.”

Gazef said with a resigned look in his eyes.

“Ah, there isn’t really much I did, I just lent the manpower to-“

“No!”

Satoru’s attempt at downplaying his part was interrupted by the brown-haired man.

“By that, I don’t mean the help you provided, what I truly meant was how you... helped the princess to break out of her shell.”

Gazef stated confusing Satoru who slightly tilted his head, for all he had a mask, his confusion must have been obvious for the man began to explain his point.

“You don’t know how it was before... the princess was just a child, a quiet child, being considered almost a bastard of the king must not have given her much choice on the matter... I am ashamed to admit, on my honor as a knight, that I overlooked her, just considering her a polite princess like her sisters before her.”

The man averted his gaze in apparent shame at his admission.

“I was too preoccupied with the King’s debilitating depression to worry about his children and what was happening around the palace... this went on for years, until you arrived... I must stress that no one expected anything from the princess, no one thought she was worth the time of day, a pretty flower she was for sure,

but one tainted by a poor pedigree and background for political games.”

He sighed as he took a deep breath before continuing.

“Then you arrived and it was like a fire was lit inside a lifeless corpse, an awakening if you will... the princess began to interest herself in anything around her... to actively observe and understand the political world... I have witnessed part of this firsthand, and I am sure when I say I never saw anyone else with more aptitude for the role of ruler than the princess... and these might not be only my thoughts alone.”

The last part he admitted in a whisper much to Satoru’s intrigue.

“Well, what can I say? Your words sound very much like treachery Warrior Captain... do you perhaps wish for my help in an uprising in the name of the princess?”

Satoru asked, not that he believed such a thing was what Gazef implied, he was not that type of man. His thoughts were immediately confirmed by the man waving his words away with a swipe of his hand as if they physically offended him.

“Of course, not... but, if I see it, others will certainly do too... certain others who might wish to use the princess to fulfil their own goals, for that... I would beg for your help in defending the princess in the future.”

The man said before trying to bow to the magic caster which immediately stopped him.

“I have no need for your begging or submission Gazef, we are friends after all.”

Satoru said with a certain stiffness in his tone, those last words had him shaken more than he thought they would.

The thought of someone trying to use the lonely girl he had just console that same day was quite... displeasing to say the least.

“I will protect her either way, with or without your help, such fine gems should be refined to make them shine at their peak condition... tell me the name, and I will see them dealt with accordingly.”

He must have said something strange for the man in front of him visibly stiffened for an instant before relaxing and smiling at him before rising his mug.

“To the Queen we all need but will never have then.”

He said with a sad smile on his face. Satoru just grabbed an abandoned empty mug on the table and raised it to match Gazef’s.

“To the Queen we all need but will never have.”

He repeated with a foreign sense of longing in his tone.

{Lakyus’ P.O.V.}

She stared into the abyss and the abyss stared back. Well, that was something she read once in a book, but she never got to use that phrase before now.

Well, the cerulean blue eyes of Renner were fixed on her own green ones, and they had been since she entered the room and sat on the bed just in front of her.

Her last meeting with her friend, or was it former friend now? Didn’t go too well. She got inspired by Gazef and the King and so tried to do the same with Renner and ask for her help, only for said princess to deny her before leaving the room immediately

after. The next time they saw each other, they were at the Council meeting and did not exchange a single word, and now... now they were like this.

“Lakyus.”

The blonde calling her name brought the swordswoman back to reality. She focused, as there were few times, she saw Renner so serious in their time together since they met almost three years ago.

“I want you to be my friend.”

Of all the things she expected, this was certainly the last one on her list.

“Eh?”

She felt stupid for that being her only answer to her declaration, but she couldn't help it, the sudden declaration of intent just took her by surprise.

“Ehm! I mean! Why?”

She tried to recover her previous blunder only managing to make an even bigger fool of herself. ‘Gods damn it! What am I?! An illiterate?!’ she complained at her own inability to utter a proper sentence.

The princess' gaze wavered for an instant as a scowl appeared on her face before disappearing immediately after as she slowly closed her eyes and sighed loudly.

“Why you ask? It is very simple really... I like you, I find you and your foolish behavior both interesting and utterly infuriating at times, spending time with you is fun, and I enjoy the cuddling.”

Lakyus was touched by her seemingly heartfelt words just before she almost did a spit take at her last point. Before they began to argue it was a common occurrence for Renner to cuddle against her while going to bed, Lakyus never complained as the body heat was appreciated during some cold nights, though saying it so openly and shamelessly almost caused a blush to appear on her face.

“T-thank... you?”

She hesitated not knowing what exactly she was supposed to say.

“So... now we are friends again?”

The princess questioned with an innocence Lakyus secretly found to be adorable.

Silence stretched between them, Renner clearly expecting an answer from her. Lakyus did not know what exactly she should say, she never stopped thinking of Renner as a friend even when they both got mad and disagreed.

“I guess so.”

She said in almost a whisper, hoping that it would be enough to satisfy the other blonde.

“Splendid! Now... the next thing is... Ehm... we should talk, yes! That’s it!”

Renner said as if she was going through some step by step schedule. Lakyus was slightly weirded out, she never saw her act this way before and it was starting to worry her. She brought a hand toward the still talking princess and placed it on her forehead, the warmth was in the norm.

“Lakyus, what are you doing?”

Renner asked seemingly perplexed.

“Uhm, you were acting a bit weird all of a sudden, I thought you were feverish.”

She answered honestly while retracting her hand.

“This is harder than I thought...”

For all the princess whispered those words, Lakyus heard them anyway in the silence of their shared room.

“I... I am not sure what exactly you are doing but... I want to be your friend too, so...”

Lakyus began without exactly knowing where she was going with her words.

“Okay, but we should really talk.”

The princess insisted and Lakyus let her do as she wished seeing how her own words weren't going anywhere.

“You asked me for help... yes, you did! So, what can I help you with?”

She asked giving her a smile that slightly stretched her cheeks a bit too much.

“Ah... uhm... I wanted you to help me with my goal... you know... stopping this war... making sure no one else get hurt...”

Her tone got lower and lower as she knew Renner would not be happy with what she was saying as shown many times before. She tensed, waiting for the usual refusal of sigh of disappointment.

“Okay then, I will help you.”

“EH!?”

She immediately covered her mouth, that was quite undignified even for her, even farmers had a better etiquette than that. Though, in her defense, the response she received completely took her by surprise.

“We are friends, and even though I think you are being stupid... I will try my best to help you reach your goal.”

The princess conceded with an exasperated sigh.

Lakyus was quite literally stunned at that, she did not expect this conversation to go this way. Well, she was happy her friend was going to help her even though she didn't believe in her goal, but that was some progress! She managed to make progress! She almost felt like shouting out in happiness at the prospect.

“But first... you must understand what you are actually asking, and what it would entail for everyone around you, and not just you.”

The princess said returning to her cold tone she used when talking about something serious.

Lakyus adjusted her position as she prepared herself to give all her attention and focus to the princess.

“Understanding the situation in all its facets is the first step toward hatching a successful plan... and before we begin, there is no way to avoid killing anyone, I doubt even gods are capable of that... that said, we can greatly minimize life loss.”

Lakyus didn't like her words but stayed silent nonetheless, she was here to listen now, then she will have her moment to speak.

Renner gave her a small smile.

“Well then... where to begin?”

A.N.

Augh, this chapter was a pain to write, so many dialogues I had to rewrite like 3 times... well at least I am pretty satisfied with the result.

Well, what do you think? Will Renner and Lakys be a winning duo? Or is this just a recipe for disaster?

Yeah, I know Renner sounds pretty weird in the last part, but what do you expect when a pathological manipulator/liar tries to tell the truth and be honest?

Must say, the Gazef and Satoru moment was one long overdue, I never managed to insert them talking about Renner in a natural way before.

Still, I hope you are running rampant with the theories on Lin's character.

Let me know your thoughts in a comment/review!

Have a nice day and stay safe! Till next time!