

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Here we are again with a juicy chapter! This one will be a pain to write, I already knew so, but well, it can't be helped!

Prepare yourself for it! And, most importantly, enjoy!

Thanks to all the new and old Patrons! You manage to support this wannabe author during these difficult times! I will never thank you enough for that!

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

Chapter 39: Of Claws, Tails, Fangs, Eyes and Tusks (part 3)

The swordswoman sat next to the sleeping form of the huge lizardman, she had been awaiting for hours for him to wake up. Be It as it may, he was still the tribe's chief and the only one who could accept or refuse their proposal.

Speaking of which, the tribesmen of Dragon Tusk were wary of her, that was an undeniable truth, they were wary of her strength. The fear in their eyes as she toppled their strongest in an almost effortless way, told her all she needed to know.

‘Might makes right... the law of this world...’ those thoughts persecuted her for the last hours. In the end, it was true, it had always been like this, ever since the beginning of time... still, that didn’t mean it was fair, damn it!

She wanted to change this... she wanted to make it right! To make it just! To make the world fair for all who inhabited it! Was this so wrong?! Was this stupid?!

It may be so... still, that was her dream... and if Renner and Satoru supported her, it might not be as foolish as others say.

The inhuman groan made her turn her head toward the lizardman, who was now rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

“You awake?”

She asked mostly to attract his attention other than anything else.

The lizardman limited himself to grumbling.

“Yeah, I can do the talking for you...”

She cleared her throat.

“Thank you for not letting me die of blood loss human!”

She said in a guttural tone, trying to mimic the lizardman’s.

“You’re welcome big lizard!”

She answered herself with a smug tone.

“Are you done?”

The lizardman chief grumbled out.

“Uhm, so you can talk, I thought I cut out your tongue by accident for a moment.”

Ziguru visibly snarled.

“The hell do you want still?”

He asked angrily.

“You are the chief, the tribe won’t move before you say so.”

The huge lizardman scoffed at her words.

“I am defeated, I am not worthy of the title of chief anymore.”

His words made her tilt her head, she was starting to have an idea about where this conversation was going.

“No! no! no! The hell you aren’t! I’m not gonna claim that title! You better get out there and stand proud for I sure as hell will not!”

She protested the unspoken statement.

“Eh! You sure about that? You claimed the title by defeating me.”

He said, and if Lakyus didn’t know any better, she would think he was giving her a sly smirk.

“Before the duel you said that I would become the chief after killing you! And, to my knowledge, you are still alive!”

She retorted eliciting a mocking snort from Ziguru.

“Dead or alive, like or dislike, the tribe will not accept me as their chief, a chief who tasted defeat in one on one combat has no place in Dragon Tusk.”

He said solemnly. ‘That would at least explain the glaring’ Lakyus thought back to the lizardmen’s reaction to Ziguru’s defeat.

“That’s stupid, how is mere strength supposed to signify one’s ability as a leader? I am sure I could best the king in one on one combat, that will not make me a better ruler than him.”

Her words were merely answered by a grumble.

“You are so fucking stubborn! Like my son, that fool!”

That actually attracted her attention.

“Your son?”

She asked, hoping to learn more about who she was dealing with.

“The fool left the village as a traveler, hoping for glory and treasures... tsk! If he went for the forest he would have a fair chance of returning, but by adventuring toward the mountains he all but assured his demise.”

The lizardman spat.

“Maybe he wanted to change things, maybe he wanted something more for his people.”

Lakyus tried, feeling most alike to this fellow adventurer in spirit.

“And in the end, he will die like everybody else, such is the fate of those who defy the world’s laws.”

His words caused her to grit her teeth in frustration.

“If I had a father like you, I would rather leave the village and die young other than live a long and worthless life and die old and full of regrets!”

Her harshness was uncalled for and she regretted her words as soon as they left her mouth. But instead of getting violent or upset, the lizardman only laughed at her, a harsh and throaty sound.

“That’s funny, those are the same words he told me before leaving the village.”

She stood up, going straight for the door.

“Don’t let me wait too much, it’s already evening outside, tomorrow we will depart, with you or without you.”

She gave her ultimatum.

“It isn’t my decision anymore, the law speaks clearly, if I accept a challenge for the rulership of the tribe, human or not, the result will determine who the next chief will be... the tribesmen will follow you, grumbling and unwillingly, but they will follow... and when the next blue moon rises you will be challenged, as tradition dictates.”

His words followed her outside the tent like a haunting ghost.

She had enough of this foolishness, she will put an end to it right now.

...

She was wrong, so very wrong.

“I am not even a lizardman!”

The blond noble protested vehemently to the council of elders before her.

“The law speaks clearly, there is no restriction on other races battling for the title of chief of a tribe.”

The pale green scaled lizardman said patiently.

“You are Dragon Tusk’s chief until the next blue moon comes, only after that you may be challenged for the position.”

Lakyus felt like bashing her head against one of the walls in frustration.

“And when will the next blue moon come?”

She asked defeated.

“In around two months.”

She had to repress a sigh at those words, this was far too much trouble for a 13 years old girl.

“Wait... does that mean that the choice of attending the meeting in the Green Claw village falls on me now?”

She asked, if that was so, it would be the only good thing coming from this.

“That is a decision for the council to discuss, but your opinion will have great weight over ours if you decide to follow this path.”

One of the elders explained. To simply order it to be so would be easy, she could use her position to command the tribe to comply.

But that was wrong, it went against everything she fought for... her very ideal, she would not force the tribe to comply only because she was the strongest.

She will show them that might DIDN'T make right!

“Well then, gather up all the important figures of the village here to discuss the matter.”

She ordered. She would show them another alternative way of handling things, and even if it end poorly she would still have made her point.

{Green Claw's village}

{Satoru's P.O.V.}

The undead chuckled, he was surrounded by young lizardmen eagerly waiting for a show. The sparkle in their eyes was delightful to look at and cause of endless amusement on his part.

‘Who would have thought young lizardmen were so cute?’ he wondered as he moved around the dead fish in his right hand.

“Well then, if you don’t chant the spell, I will not be able to cast it.”

That was a little game he played with the children, it helped to endear himself to the other members of the tribe.

“““Fishy, fishy, come at me!

Boneless, gutted, and free to eat!

Roasted, boiled or even fresh!

In my net you are going to mesh!

And since you look so yummy!

You will surely fill up my tummy!””””

As the children finished chanting, the fish in Satoru’s hand glowed and from the light a waterfall of cloned fish erupted, much to the joy of the children who tried to gather up as many as they could before running off.

He looked them flee away, if only he could be as carefree as them... ‘why can’t I have a break?’ he thought in defeat. Hilma was updating him daily on their new... guest’s... activities.

Fifth tier casters weren’t unheard of, but to have one displaying their cards like this, either they were foolish, something Satoru doubted since they managed to track him down in such short time, or this wasn’t the extent of their power. Meaning he could be dealing with a possible 7th or 8th tier magic caster, even though he never heard of one as Fluder was hailed as the most powerful human magic caster.

That was just it! What he was dealing with might not even be human at all! That worried him much, for he had no idea how to strategize against someone he knew nothing about, apart from her apparently using some kind of crystal magic, something that didn't even exist in Yggdrasil to begin with!

At first he even thought it might have been some strange derivation of ice magic but Hilma assured him the spells emanated no cold, she confirmed it by talking to those who were hit by it and survived.

Which meant he was going against unknown magic of uncertain power. For all he knew that might be some kind of holy spell that could be super effective against him.

Hell, for all he knew, he might be dealing with another player here!

He might have sounded restrained and calm while giving Hilma orders, but he was anything but calm on the inside! Bless his Emotional Suppression!

Now he was dealing with the lizardmen's problem while trying to think about what to do with the situation back in the kingdom! He had no idea if he should even go on with the expedition or call it off as soon as possible and hurry back.

The mountains weren't going anywhere after all...

The mountains... yes! How couldn't he have thought about this before?! Frost Giants and Frost Dragons were rumored to roam the mountains, if only he could get them to...

“Master Satoru.”

His train of thought was interrupted by the arrival of his youngest apprentice, Rayne.

“What is it?”

He tried to not show annoyance at the child’s interruption even though he wasn’t really in the mood to deal with him at the moment.

On his part, his student seemed to pick up on his mood and fidgeted nervously on the place.

“I-I need to ask you something...”

He began, focusing his eyes on the undead’s gown as to avoid his eyes.

“H-have you spoken with Arche?”

The boy asked nervously making Satoru wonder what all this was about.

“No, I have not, did you two argue again?”

It wasn’t exactly a unusual sight to see the two of them argue about academics, something Satoru was greatly interested in as he tried to understand the science behind magic and its inner workings. Maybe he could one day learn new spells or create his own, as others already did.

“Well n-no- I mean yeah- I mean! It’s complicated!”

The boy stuttered out seemingly unsure of what to say. Satoru sighed, he was not here to babysit anyone, though some might think otherwise, the only reason he continued to have Rayne and Arche around was merely out of curiosity. A learning experience to see how Yggdrasil magic developed in this world.

“Did something happen?”

He tried to ask more gently, prompting the boy to finally look him in the eyes.

“She said... some very hurtful things to me...”

The brown-haired boy muttered. ‘Is she in that period of the month? Or is it just puberty hitting? Well, I am not here to give them the talk, I am a mentor, not a parent... though, some encouraging words may not hurt’ the undead pondered in his head.

“Sometimes we say things that we don’t truly mean... maybe she is very worried about something right now and she just had to vent on someone... I would not take her words to heart and instead wait and see what she does next.”

He stated trying to sound as adult as possible.

“Try to not get in her way and see if she manage to come to terms with her own matters.”

He suggested eliciting a nod from the boy.

“Okay Master Satoru, I will do as you say!”

He said seemingly reinvigorated by his words.

“Now carry on, I have important matters to deal with.”

He said as he was eager to come back to his previous strategizing.

The apprentice bowed and ran off into a random direction disappearing between the vegetation around the lake.

{Arche’s P.O.V.}

She kicked a pebble away from her path, she was furious and scared at the same time.

For months she had spied and reported on Satoru and his every movement. At first it was easy and the only hard thing was not getting caught. But then, she got attached, she was used to be always a second thought in all's but her parents' mind, yet Satoru took care of her as if she was his daughter and not his apprentice.

She had her fair share of experience with instructors, and he was not one of them most of the time. His lessons didn't limit themselves to magic, he taught her strategy, life lessons, he did everything for her to experience the world in all its many facets.

She didn't even associate such a behavior to parenthood at first. Her parents never did any of that with her, they limited themselves to paying instructors over instructors to teach her etiquette and all she would need as a noble.

It was only when she saw Rayne interact with his parents that she understood the strange behavior of Satoru, he was teaching her how to live at her best, giving her notions her own parents should have and offering her the means and knowledge to succeed in life.

And yet... she stabbed him in the back... again and again, with each passing month. The guilt eroded her from within. She had finally managed to make friends, and she was forced to continuously cross them behind their backs.

All to keep her family safe, her father and mother, her baby sisters... she knew what would happen to all of them if she tried to defy the emperor's orders.

Everyday the weight of that mission got heavier, she spent many nights crying in her bed alone. Even the last night, she thought

her silent breakdown went unheard and unnoticed, that was until he felt soft and caring hands embracing and reassuring her.

She lost herself in that warm embrace, remembering how her mother would do something similar while she was sick as a child. And yet, that touch meant so much more than mere comfort.

Rayne, the name of a boy that she was never meant to meet. A son of a woodcarver of the kingdom with dreams of grandeur. They were opposite in almost everything.

She had noble etiquette, he was as unrefined as a rock. She had been educated in all fields, he was a self-taught boy who could barely write something legible. She was a prominent heir of an important house, he was a nobody who could merely aspire to his father's craft or work as a farmer.

She detested the boy at first, a mere nuisance, a little scoundrel who got lucky, nothing more than that. But he proved her wrong again and again, while she took a step forward after the other he would do the same, following her, no matter if it meant staying up countless nights to study and practice.

He was fighting a losing battle against a prodigy like herself, and yet, he wasn't losing at all. His resilience was the first trait she found herself admiring of him.

In time he showed her more and more his worth. For all they bickered often, she knew that his advices were as valid as any she would get among her peers at the Academy in the Empire.

But no matter what, she was continuously getting irked by him, that was until they departed, then she understood the root of her problem with him. She was envious.

The way his mother doted on him with every smile and gesture, the way his father hugged him fiercely with tears in his eyes before letting him go on an adventure.

She never received any of it from her parents. She always thought she was being treated well and loved, but then why, why didn't they come and wish her a good trip before she departed from the Empire? Why didn't they bother to ever visit her in almost a year since she departed? Where were the hugs? The crying reunions and farewells? Where was love and care?

Taken by a sudden rush of rage she punched the nearest thing, which happened to be a tree, with all her might. She felt fresh tears gather in her eyes as the pain resurfaced.

That was why she was furious with herself and scared at the same time. For all that pain was washed away that last night when she fell asleep lulled into that boy's embrace.

She could not get attached, no matter what. Not to Satoru, not to the gentle and strict Hilma, not to Lakys who she admired so much, and absolutely not to the boy who had such sway over her emotions.

'Damn it! Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! DAMN IT ALL!' she cried in her mind as she continued to punch and kick the unmoving tree until she felt her breath come up short.

She turned away from the tree after calming herself somehow only to come face to face with a very anxious looking Rayne who probably managed to sneak up on her due to her being distracted by her own thoughts.

"What do you want?!"

She snarled, putting as much venom as possible in her tone, she needed to push this boy away, otherwise she had no idea how much more her resolve could still resist.

She mentally sighed in relief when the boy cowered at her words only for his expression to steel in what seemed to be determination.

“I am here to help!”

He declared fiercely making her almost scoff, what could he do? He had no political nor physical power, he could do nothing for her.

“Get out of my way, you insufferable co-“

She tried to go past him but her arm was snatched midway, locking her on the spot.

“I don’t want to know what haunts you so, but to see you suffer like this...it hurts me just as much.”

She wanted to say something in retort to his words, but she found herself forced silent by the lump in her throat, she felt that if she spoke once more, tears would begin to leak from her eyes... and she knew that she would not be able to stop herself.

She felt the strong grip on her arm relent as the hand traced its way down to her wrist, gently rising her hand up.

“Gods, look at what you have done... and we don’t have Lakyus to fix this right now...”

She looked curiously at what the boy was referring to and, indeed, her knuckles were bleeding profusely, she didn’t even register the pain till that moment.

Rayne immediately threw his backpack on the ground and proceeded to rummage through it with vigor until he took out some clean bandages and some alcohol.

“I had a few adventurers show me how it’s done... so it should be fine...”

He proceeded to imbue the bandages with the alcohol before proceeding to clean up her bleeding wounds with care and gentleness. She grimaced at the stinging and burning sensation of the alcohol on her bruised knuckles. She got so used to healing magic that she forgot the pain of actually having the heal a wound the old-fashioned way.

The boy tied up tightly the bandages around her hand.

“You should be careful with this for a while now, at least until Lakyus comes back.”

He told her.

“Thank you.”

She couldn’t stop the words from leaving her lips eliciting a small sad smile from the slightly younger brown-haired boy.

“This is what friends do for each other, isn’t it?”

He said before leaving her to her own devices.

Good, now she felt like shit. ‘Friends, eh? I don’t deserve... a friend like you at all’ she thought before leaving the forest and returning toward the lake.

{Dragon Tusk’s Village}

{Lakyus’ P.O.V.}

Again, the young girl found herself wanting to bash her skull against something hard until she passed out. Even if she knew Leinas would intervene before such a thing came to be.

“Lady Lakyus, maybe it would be better to return and let the lizardmen handle this among themselves.”

The empire knight suggested.

“No! That would be like giving up! You know as well as me what would happen then... a one-sided massacre, four tribes against one.”

The noble heir protested vehemently against her protector’s proposal.

“Then, you can impose yourself with your power, as the newly appointed chief, no one could oppose you if it came down to a duel.”

Lakyus stomped her foot on the spot in rage.

“THAT WOULD BE EVEN WORSE! I am trying to change this! To not make it a matter of strength! For this is not! This is a strategic move that has nothing to do with power!”

She retorted furiously.

“My Lady, everything in this world is a matter of power, be it physical, magical or political.”

The words of the older woman did nothing but transform her burning rage into a blazing inferno. ‘Is that so Leinas!? So, you think it too! Might makes right! To think, I thought of you as an ally! You are just like everyone else!’ Lakyus could not help but feel betrayed by those words, she felt truly and utterly alone.

“GO AWAY!”

She roared as the older blonde left her without another word.

Lakyus collapse on the ground, a weeping mess. Why? Why didn't anyone understand? How wrong this world is.

“Kyuuu!”

She felt something wet over her right cheek, the small hydra was trying to cheer her up. She weakly smiled at the small creature.

“Ah, in the end, it is just you and me, little one.”

She whispered as she hugged the baby hydra, uncaring of his wetness.

The meeting went as poorly as it could have gone. All of the lizardmen were against her idea, they offered to solve the matter over a fight, something she vehemently refused. This was not how things should be handled, no, this was exactly what she wanted to avoid.

But that seemed to only anger the lizardmen further, since there the matter came to a stalemate, where no matter the reasoning, the lizardmen continued to object for the sake of it.

That was frustrating like all hell, she could not, for the life of hers, get a grasp on these lizardmen. When she saw Renner and Satoru talk with Green Claw it didn't seem remotely as hard.

She just couldn't understand what she was doing wrong.

“So, you were here.”

The gruff and guttural voice of a certain lizardman interrupted her misery.

She looked up, only to be greeted by the huge and scarred form of Ziguru.

“Came here to make fun of me? Go ahead, see if I care.”

She said lowly, not wanting to give the bastard the satisfaction of seeing her broken.

The lizardman, on his part, barked a laugh before seating in front of her bringing the fish he was carrying in his hand to his mouth and taking a large bite out of it.

“Eh! There’s no fun in beating a dead fish!”

He said, their green eyes so similar and yet so different meeting.

“I came here to tell you that the elders will be ready to depart tomorrow.”

That statement actually attracted her attention.

“What?”

She asked, confused.

“For the meeting at Green Claw, damn, try at least to remember your own suggestions, will you?”

He mocked taking another bite.

“B-but, everyone was against it!”

She protested as the lizardman barked another laugh.

“Yeah, they were pretty pissed about your shrimpy approach and coward’s way.”

He said mockingly, making the young blonde grimace.

“So why?”

She just asked.

“Well, that was before I went and spoke to them.”

Lakyus felt her jaw unhinging.

“Y-you spoke to them! How did you convince them?!”

She asked, wanting to know where she went wrong.

“I told them they were being a bunch of fools and that their place was to listen to their chief and not to be a bunch of children.”

The lizardman said.

“Then I proceeded to teach a lesson to all those who didn’t agree, I may have been defeated, but I am still the strongest lizardman in the village.”

And with that, Lakyus’ hopes were run over by a dragon. ‘Of course, violence is the answer, might makes right...’ she told herself with spite.

“That was exactly what I wanted to avoid, if I wanted to go down that route, I could have done so myself.”

She said in resignation.

“But you didn’t.”

The lizardman retorted, riling up Lakyus once more.

“Because there is another way! A more peaceful way!”

She said, pushing her point across once more.

“There is no other way.”

The lizardman simply said without hesitation.

“How can you say that if you didn’t even try?!”

She asked angrily in frustration making the lizardman chuckle sadly as he finished the remaining fish in one fell swoop of his jaw.

“Oh, I tried, trust me on that.”

Those words caught the blonde’s attention, she waited for him to elaborate as her anger was replaced by curiosity.

Silence descended between the two, until Ziguru sighed heavily.

“Before the war, when food was starting depleting, we lizardmen of Dragon Tusk were the first to turn to the forest for nourishment and resources.”

The ex-chief began, his gruff tone far more serious than Lakyus ever heard him be.

“Life was hard, and food was barely enough, but we were managing, me, my brother and a group of our strongest pushed ourselves ever further in the eastern part of the forest, managing to hunt more and more.”

The lizardman paused before sighing.

“Then, we came across a group of humans, they were well equipped, there was no doubt about it, we had no intention of fighting them... we told them as much... not that it mattered to them at all apparently.”

Lakyus already had an idea where this whole thing was going.

“We fought for our lives, but it was no use, to this day, I have no idea why we were slaughtered like that... my friends, my brother, they all died as I ran for my life and somehow managed to lose them in the depths of the forest.”

She could see his sharp teeth gritting as he recalled the event.

“Wounded in both pride and body, I barely managed to come back to the village... I was the one who proposed to talk it over, it was my fault all of this happened, maybe if I just decided to jump them

instead of trying a more peaceful approach... my friends and my brother would still be alive.”

There was no anger in his tone, just resignation.

“I alone was spared that dreadful fate, I, who had caused that situation in the first place was spared... I never found out anything more about what had become of my companions nor why it happened... but regardless of their reasons, they still managed to do so because they were stronger.”

His green eyes looked down at her, the hard stare making her feel even smaller than she was.

“They were stronger, so they had the power to choose who lived and who died, they had the right to choose what was wrong and what was right... without the power, they would have been nothing... hell, we might have even jumped them and eaten them if we were desperate enough...”

Zlguru admitted without remorse.

“Strength is the only thing that matters in this world, there is no choice without power, the more power you have the more things you can choose, the more power you have the more you will live in this world.”

The lizardman stood up.

“You have a kind heart, that is a very admirable thing... you are trying to do things your way, but that will be your doom, and sooner or later your yourself or somebody you love will pay for your actions... that is a weight I wouldn't wish upon anyone else.”

Ziguru left her with those words, the dreadful warning lingering in the silent air as Lakyus contemplated what she just heard.

She wished to change the world, she promised it to herself, that no matter what, she would do it. She never thought her actions would harm anyone other than herself. But what if others got hurt, what if Arche or Rayne got hurt? What if Renner got hurt? Would her resolution stand strong then? Or would she crumble to dust?

A shadow of her former self...

{Green Claw's Village}

{Gazef's P.O.V.}

The Warrior Captain stood vigil, on guard against anything which could come to harm his princess. He sat in front of the campfire, alongside Satoru, the companion of numerous nights.

“There is no need to push yourself Gazef, I already told you, I don't need much sleep and I already casted many a protective spells around this area.”

The magic caster said from behind his mask while flipping a page of the book currently in his hands.

Indeed, that was true, the caster didn't need much sleep at all, for all Gazef had previously lost his friendship with Satoru, he never doubted his skill in the slightest.

“Maybe another night Satoru, today I prefer to stay up, I would like to ask you something actually.”

The strongest knight in Re-Estize responded, catching the attention of the caster. It was true, they had been at odds for the longest time after Satoru's ascension to his noble position.

The only reasons why this strained silence between them stopped at all was due to the words the princess told him before, Gazef already had offered his apologies to Satoru for his behavior and Satoru answered in kind with an apology of his own, something that surprised Gazef, maybe the Satoru he had come to know as a friend wasn't a mask after all.

But they never actually spoke of it in details, he needed to think about it and not rush things like last time, he wanted to set things right and get a clear answer from Satoru to get to the bottom of this and finally understand the man before him.

“Why didn't you tell me princess Renner had been an active participant in your operations?”

To his question Satoru promptly put down his book and gazed at him.

“Did she tell you that herself?”

He asked, his tone as calm as always.

“Yes.”

He admitted immediately.

“Then, you already have your answer.”

The magic caster responded much to Gazef's slightly irritation. ‘Is it because you didn't want to divulge her secrets out of loyalty? Or do you have another agenda?’ that question was yet to be answered.

“Gazef, if you want me to give you a direct answer, give me a direct question... it is not my place to divulge Renner's secrets, she does what she needs to do, I merely offered her the means to do so.”

The masked man said.

“So, you just obey like that, like a good lapdog?”

There was no resentment behind Gazef’s words, but Satoru’s reaction was all but reassuring.

The caster pointed his hand at the Warrior Captain and a shiver went down his spine, it was like standing before death itself, the shadows cast by the fire only amplifying that parallelism.

“Have you ever tried seeing things from my side Gazef? Like, at all? I have arrived in an unknown land and have been thrust into an unknown position, I subjugated a whole criminal organization that had a far larger grasp than I initially thought possible and I have been trying to turn it around into something positive for the kingdom for the last two years.”

The caster paused as the feeling of death around him diminished.

“Fortunately for me, I have found someone willing to help me in that endeavor and who understood the importance of not simply destroying the underground world but use it for the betterment of the kingdom as a whole.”

The magic caster was clearly ranting by now, but Gazef had no intention of stopping him, this was the most he got out of him on the matter.

“Then some damnable idiots tried to cause a coup... that was great, I had nothing to do with it and couldn’t care less of what happened... but that little girl, that princess that most of her family despised, was the one and only reason I intervened at all... it was only out of the respect I had for her brilliant mind and character that I lent her my strength to salvage the situation.”

Satoru seemed to hesitate there for a moment, making Gazef question if he was going to stop there.

“You understand Gazef, don’t you? That girl showed me that I could do something great for once, that I could bring salvation and better the lives of many... what are a few hundreds lives of corrupted and treasonous nobles compared to a whole kingdom? Is the continuous suffering of the commoners worth all of that?”

That was a question Gazef already had an answer to, even if it pained him to admit it.

“What did you want me to do Gazef? Tell you everything beforehand? Would that have changed anything? Did you want me to betray the trust of the only person doing something good for this rotten kingdom?”

Gazef felt guilt rise inside him, he never thought of it like that before.

“I never wanted all this power and responsibility Gazef, I would have been satisfied being a successful merchant, an easier life that would allow me to explore the land to my heart’s content... instead I accepted to walk this path, to finally achieve something in my life, to finally make someone happy.”

The magic caster continued, those blue gems on his mask now fixed on him.

“Tell me Gazef, is that such a dreadful sin?”

Of all the many question the magic caster asked, this was the one that he surely wanted an answer too. Gazef had felt betrayed by him, seeing his rise as he saw any calculated move of any noble. A grab for power, that was all the Warrior Captain saw. But there was more, so much more hidden beneath that.

He had only been too blind to see it.

Indeed, the Satoru he knew as his friend had been somehow a mask, much like the one he carried all the time, but was the lie and deception worth the result? Would he have preferred for Satoru to betray the princess' trust for him, and possibly jeopardize the whole operation they managed to build up over years?

There was just one right answer to that.

“No.”

The short word escaped his lips easily as the previous accusations did, it felt liberatory to say it out loud, as if he just lifted a weight lying on his chest.

His king had been right all along, princess Renner was the future of the kingdom, no matter who sat on the throne, as long as she was in control, everything would be alright.

A.N.

And here we have it, like jeez... such an heavy chapter to write. We got so much stuff going on in the background! And the sweet character's development juice is not stopping flowing like a river.

What will happen next? That is for me to know and for you to speculate on!

So, with that said, leave a comment/review, will you?

Stay safe and healthy! See you next time!