

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

And here we are again! Sorry for the 1 day delay as my PC decided to be an asshole and delete almost 2k worth of words and I had to rewrite the whole thing.

Problems aside, I hope you will enjoy this chapter, a little bit of an interlude before the second part of this arc, but I am sure you will find much amusement in it!

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

Chapter 42: Contracts, Heroes, and Ice Cream

“So, it’s that it?”

The lizardman chief asked gazing at the offered paper with almost reverence and awe, or that was at least Satoru’s impression.

“Yes, this signature of mine indicates the validity of the contract, it is unfortunate there is no one in your tribes who could write or read, maybe in the future that could be rectified?”

The masked undead proposed.

He and the five tribe's chiefs were currently occupying one of the shacks originally meant to be a storage. They were just finalizing the last details of their agreement, much to Satoru's relief, for all he was interested in the different kinds of lizardmen, and even more in the ones which was rumored descended from the line of a Dragon Lord, he wanted nothing more than depart to his original destination right now.

“Sir Satoru, could you explain again what this piece of paper is for? Even after we have extensively gone over all the details.”

Questioned the albino lizardman he found so fascinating. He wondered if her spawns would inherit that trait, or if that was part of the reason behind her aptitude towards druidic magic.

He decided to indulge the only female chief's request.

“Of course, this is a form of agreement very common in the Re-Estize Kingdom, due to the unreliability of words and memory, it is much safer to write down all the details and sign the paper to mark each of the parties' agreement to what was written on it... unfortunately this is only partially effective at the moment due to the lack of anyone capable of reading this among your tribes... so a minimum of faith is required at the moment, but I hope such a thing will be short lived in future dealings.”

The magic caster explained to the lizardmen present.

“Uhm, what would happen if the agreement was broken?”

The oldest of the chiefs asked with some wariness.

“It really depends on the content of the contract, there are some who might retaliate violently to such a thing.”

The Overlord began making sure that the lizardman wasn't try to cross him on that part. It would be unfortunate to give the impression of being an easy prey.

His words seemed to have the desired effect when most of the chiefs tensed up at his words.

“But that is not my case, I hardly desire violence to occur between business partners, though... if you go back on the agreement, I will surely stop any line of supply the contract mentions.”

He explained making the other occupants of the shack slightly relax.

“What would happen if you broke the agreement?”

The albino asked again, her tone as serious as it could be. That made Satoru think for a moment, he had no intention of going against his own contract so that thought never occurred to him. Still, he had to give an answer.

“Uhm, I imagine you would refuse to provide any service requested by me... unfortunately that is all you could do, I am the one investing more in this after all... you might try and bring it up with the Re-Estize's king, but I doubt much would come from that.”

He explained as sincerely as he could, there was really nothing more those backwater tribes composed by such few numbers could do to him.

“Though, rest assured, I have no intention of going back on my word as long as you stay true to yours, it would not sit well with the name of a successful merchant to be associated with not being faithful to his own contracts.”

He tried to sweeten the deal with a possible loss of reputation on his part, even though, he highly doubted anyone would care if he broke up an agreement with a bunch of demi-humans.

“I see, we have put our faith in you Sir Satoru, not mentioning the future of our people, I hope our judgement was not misguided.”

She said bowing her head slightly in his direction.

“I understand your worries, but I will do all in my power to ensure the positive result we all hope for.”

One of his salaryman’s classic sentences came out naturally to him. Worthless words without anything backing them up, that was all they were in the ruthless selling business of the 22nd century, here though they might have a slightly better sounding.

“We are counting on you then Sir Satoru.”

Shasuryu spoke staring him directly in the eyes.

“How soon will you be able to mobilize your searching parties?”

The undead asked, as it was about time to speak of their part of the contract.

“I think we might start to organize that as soon as all chiefs return to their village to deal with the new developments and the food reserves you gently provided.”

Shasuryu explained eliciting a nod from each of the chiefs, some more idly some more reluctantly. That was an acceptable time frame in Satoru’s opinion, he already spent a month here, so waiting a week or so more shouldn’t be a problem.

{Renner’s P.O.V.}

The youngest princess of Re-Estize gazed at the strange four headed being at her knight's side, an hydra Satoru called it, a deformed one at that judging by the lizardmen's comments.

Let it to Lakyus to go around and pick up the strangest of beings and take them with her. Though she wasn't one to talk considering her own tastes in company which were considered rather odd by anyone else's standards. Not that she gave a damn about others' opinion.

“Lakyus, how many times do I have to tell you to keep your hydra outside the tent?”

She asked in an exasperated manner, much to the noble's embarrassment.

“Ah, uhm, sorry... he just feels lonely...”

The blonde swordswoman apologized with a small sincere smile.

Things were still awkward between the two of them, they kind of silently decided to ignore what happened and tried to go back to how it was but that didn't seem to work and only postponed their unavoidable confrontation.

“The problem isn't the beast himself, it is you stinking of fish for the rest of the day.”

To be truthful, the smell wasn't all that strong, but she felt petty in that moment and didn't want the girl to get off with just an apology.

He might have judged Satoru and Gazef unfairly before, this was far harder than she made it out to be in her mind. Though, she acknowledged how the difficulty arose more by the fact Lakyus was her only friend and had a special place in her mind, she could

not bring herself to dismiss her like anyone else... the sole thought of that, hurt her.

This was weird, she never had any reservation in ensuring the most painful demise for anyone in her way, and yet, she could not bring herself to hurt the green-eyed knight in the slightest.

This was... troubling.

Lakyus was special in some way, till this moment Renner thought that she had chosen her as her friend and so it was her right to set Lakyus aside if she wished so. But, right now, it seemed that choice was not made so egoistically as she thought at first.

Maybe... just maybe... Lakyus too chose to be her friend, and she could not bring herself to cut off that mutual bond.

Perhaps, this was what Satoru always spoke about when he told one of his tales of adventure in the past, when he was still with his comrades, his friends.

“Luck doesn’t stink!”

The noble girl vehemently rebutted her accusation much to the princess’ amusement.

“Say Lakyus, what do you intend to do with your current position?”

Renner finally decided to return to a more dignified and serious demeanor. That was, after all, one of the biggest current problems and she wanted to know if her friend gave it some thought.

“I... I am not sure, this whole thing started from an accident, I certainly am not fit to lead anyone around and.... I let Ziguru continue to lead the tribe in all but name as I have no idea what I should do.”

The noble admitted much to the princess agreement. Lakyus has never been much of a leader in Renner's book, she was a cute puppy for sure, but not someone ready to lead a social structure as complex as a tribe. An adventurer team? Probably yes, but not a village of demi-humans.

"I will probably pass on the title on whoever challenges me first when the right time comes."

The noble admitted, that was the same idea Renner had, it would be the best way to do some damage control.

"Good enough, make sure to not give command to some idiot."

She said jokingly eliciting a chuckle from the swordswoman.

"You mean like me?"

She asked while caressing her cooing hydra.

"Don't say such things Lakyus, you are thick headed not an idiot."

The princess corrected her knight. For all she had her problems with Lakyus, she would never call her a idiot, she was stubborn and did not have much of a mind for politics, but she excelled in many other aspects of life, and certainly was talented.

She had learnt, in these last years, to appreciate other skills outside the mental sphere thanks to Satoru's influence. Power and potential could hide within everyone, but only a select few could look at a person and grasp their true potential. Satoru was such a person, there was no doubt about it, the people he surrounded himself with were a testament to that truth.

"You think so?"

Lakyus' words took her out of her small mental digression.

“I never thought of myself as very smart.”

She said in a low tone barely hearable by the princess. Those words irked her far more than they should have, the self-deprecating tone of her knight was something she would not stand for.

“And who exactly told you that?”

She asked, annoyance clear as day into her tone.

“You are a prodigy with the blade, your adapting capabilities are outstanding among most, and you can see clearly the bigger picture even though your upbringing should have conditioned you otherwise... those are all things that would make you look like a genius to most people, so who the hell told you otherwise?”

She questioned the young swordswoman who seemed taken aback by her words. The princess herself was quite surprised by how many qualities she managed to bring up as the words erupted from her naturally, not giving them much thought. But all of it was true nonetheless, so she didn't feel the need to correct anything she said.

“Though your way of thinking is greatly flawed in my own opinion... but that is part of what makes you so fascinating I guess...”

She added, taking a risk in mentioning their clashing point once more, though, she was adamant about making clear she did not agree with her at all.

Lakyus stayed there speechless for a moment, Renner was ready to start another debate at any moment if the young noble still wanted to prove her point. But that didn't happen. Instead, her

knight just gave her a gentle small smile before returning to feeding her hydra.

“Thank you, Renner.”

The words were simple and to the point, exactly like she was, although the princess could not help but feel the intensity behind them. There was something oddly satisfying in seeing someone smile due to her words, was this why Satoru never stopped prompting her for a smile every now and then? She wondered inside her head.

{Southern Azerlisia Mountains}

{???

The chill air was a good change of pace from the usual warmth, truly, she thought mountains were supposed to be snowy, but then again, this was the first time she was getting near one. Books could just do so much for personal culture, sooner or later experience would be needed, that was indeed true for all matters of life.

With a stomp of her foot she split in two the skull of the mountain troll that thought her an easy prey. ‘Foolish brute...’ those were the only words to describe the pathetic sight before her.

A sudden blast of wind blew her midnight black hair all around her form. If she knew they would be such a bother she would have tied them up. But she could be only that mad about it as they were the sole reminder of her mother she still carried around.

But for all she appreciated the trip and the new environment this was not the reason why she was here. No, she was here for a very specific thing, or she should say someone. And the fact she didn’t

find a trace of said someone for the last few days of her going around this giant rock wasn't helping her mood.

With a swift motion she pushed back her long hair and proceeded over the troll's corpse. Maybe she should have tried to pick up a map even though that would mean making contact in at least a small town if not a city, that she could not risk. Spies were everywhere after all, be it Re-Estize or Baharuth, she could not afford the risk.

Also, weren't dragons supposed to be around here? She wouldn't mind a good tumble with one of those to ride out her frustration. Maybe she should try near the base of the mountain? She kind of already gave up on asking any demi-humans as they were just incapable of comprehending most of what she said.

She took a long sip from her water flask as she evaluated her options. After all she was acting on limited information, giving a look around couldn't hurt.

A roar coming from behind her made her come out of her train of thought. With a glance she confirmed her suspicion, that troll wasn't much of a loner as it initially seemed. She could count at least five more trolls brandishing their rudimental weapons at her like the troglodytes they were.

“So, you want to dance too? Let's hope you are more of a challenge than your disgusting friend!”

She taunted as her black eyes narrowed on the incoming demi-humans as she unsheathed her halberd.

{Ro-Lente}

{Evileye's P.O.V.}

The masked vampire sat on one of the sofas in Hilma's study as said woman went over mountains of papers like it was the most normal thing.

To say the truth, she still found her work ethic incredibly admirable. She had been here for almost a month and there wasn't a day that woman didn't work, she even managed to spy over some of the documents out of curiosity, for all she was well educated, she could not grasp most of the calculus in there. Import prices and tax collection was one thing, but budget and fraud control were matters she could only understand that much.

For all she came here to meet the magic caster she could not deny the fascination she found in observing the inner workings of Seven Hands. The revolutionary techniques and social structuring it represented was a great step forward in favor of the common folk. It wasn't hard to understand why this Satoru managed to get where he is right now in such short a time. Too often nobility and aristocracy disregarded the power of public opinion and what it meant to be liked by the masses.

That man basically had the whole kingdom dancing in the palm of his hand. He took over the Adventurer Guild, the Magician Guild and, probably, the Merchant Guild as well she suspected. He destroyed any possible future opposition by decimating nobility. Even more he did it and gave all responsibility to the king as the one who gave such orders. He ascended to the highest grade of nobility, silencing anyone foolish enough to dare protest his lack of rank, all while still managing the whole of the underworld of the kingdom. On top of that he had imprinted in the people the image of a noble and just man who respected others and helped the poor and unfortunate.

Truly, she might have to give him the first spot on her ranking of perfect takeovers she had witnessed during her long life.

A fearsome fellow this Satoru was. The duel he had with the Imperial Court Wizard, Fluder Paradyne, only enhancing the legendary status he already achieved. And if his managing of the kingdom was to be taken in account, she doubted the man showed all of his cards already.

A troubling conclusion, but far from unreasonable, nonetheless. ‘Could he be... one of them?’ that was a thought she left in the back of her mind ever since learning of the existence of said magic caster.

A powerful man coming from no one knew where, a story she already heard and saw with her own eyes. Though, that was were any resemblance ended. This man did not use his power to kill Dragon Lords, conquer countries or cause meaningless chaos. That brought her to an halt to her initial conclusion, there might be nothing to worry about after all. For all the old hag wanted her to investigate profusely on this Satoru fellow, she had been pretty relaxed ever since their disastrous first encounter.

She had to commend Hilma and Seven Hands though, if she had been a less experienced and less powerful caster, she would have probably died on that ambush. For all her equipment had resistance to magic she was sure the sheer amount and power of spells launched at her would have been enough to subdue some of the weaker Thirteen Heroes.

It was truly a commendable organization that allowed such weaklings to take on beings as powerful as those, and she could not help but be impressed.

“What are you thinking about?”

The words of the blond woman behind a desk woke her up from her musings.

“And how do you know I was thinking about anything at all?”

The magic caster asked curious to know how the human knew of her state despite her mask.

“You tend to look down every time you are in deep thought, truly you should try to be less obvious.”

The woman quipped with a victorious small smile adorning her face. ‘Perceptive... you are a dangerous snake Hilma’ her eyes narrowed on the smiling woman who had managed to pick up on her habits in just a few weeks.

She always thought of herself as someone inscrutable, unreadable with her mask covering her face, and her tone trained to not betray any emotion. That wasn’t the case apparently.

“You are a dangerous woman, Hilma.”

That was the nearest thing to a compliment she would give, even though that only prompted the woman to snort.

“You are one to talk?”

She answered, irony dripping from each syllable as she settled her papers on the desk, piling them up ordinally.

“Though, I wonder, what kind of demi-human are you?”

That took the short vampire aback, she didn’t expect such a question being asked so lightly. She expected the woman to have her suspicions, as any intelligent enough being would but the

surety which she used in asking the question was totally unexpected on the caster's part.

“How can you say that I am in the first place?”

She asked trying to maintain her tone levelled and calm as usual. The woman seemed to think about it for a moment before answering.

“Let's just say... I have had experience in dealing with this before.”

The vague answer wasn't appreciated by the short girl, she was truly starting to lose her initial upper hand on this woman.

“The fact you are technically a child masquerading her voice doesn't really help your case though... if I had to take a guess I would put my money on an elf.”

The second in command of Seven Hands added, filling in the silence which was created. That possible but wrong guess made the masked caster relax, her secret was safe for now even though she felt like the longer she stayed the more she would be unraveled by the woman currently sharing the room with her.

“I have been in the slums the other day.”

She decided it would be better to leave the matter be and have the woman reach her own conclusions without her risking revealing more by accident.

“Yes, I know.”

Hilma responded to her statement while picking up a new bunch of papers.

“You have spies there? I should have imagined that.”

Evileye faked some degree of surprise. She knew they had eyes everywhere in the kingdom even more in the capital itself. She just hoped the woman would disclose something new. But to her surprise Hilma limited herself to laugh.

“Spies? Well, if you want to think of the whole population of the slums as spies have it your way.”

That amused comment confused the short vampire, she gave the woman an inquisitive stare from behind her mask and Hilma seemed to catch up on it as she flashed her an even bigger smirk.

“Where do you think the population of the slums pass their time? They work at our establishments... they drink at our establishments... the fuck and get drunk at our establishments... and they speak a lot at our establishments... we do not need spies, the whole population is our informant... every little information and rumor gets analyzed and, if deemed important enough, reported to the right people.”

The woman explained nonchalantly. If that wasn't clear before, this all but confirmed that Seven Hands owned the capital, and probably the rest of the kingdom, on a level deep enough that their extirpation would probably bring a social crisis at best, if not total collapse at worse.

Evileye had known many criminal organizations before, but never did she see something so eradicated inside a country before and the fact this was achieved in mere two years was a preposterous thing, something she would have never believed if she didn't see it with her own two eyes.

Seven Hands had ascended in her mind, she initially thought it was a mere criminal underground large enough to encompass the

whole kingdom and, while impressive, that would not be the first case she ever saw. But Seven Hands wasn't only that, it was far more. Seven Hands didn't only become a pillar of the community, or a point of reference for the people... no, the truth was that Seven Hands was the people. From the wealthy merchant, to the humble artisan, to the beggar in the lower district.

Each one of them knew that Seven Hands kept the peace, that Seven Hands meant stability, that no one would suffer or go hungry if they came their way.

That was both a heartwarming and terrifying truth. For to tear down Seven Hands right now meant tearing down the very social structure of the kingdom, alongside everything that came with it.

The people have curled around the giant stable and safe pillar that was Seven Hands like ivy would grow around a stone column, slowly merging and becoming one and the same with each other.

“You seem quite speechless, didn't you want to tell me something about the slums before?”

Her torrent of thoughts was interrupted by Hilma's calm voice which woke her up from her self-induced trance as she just now grasped the depths of Seven Hands influence on the kingdom and its people.

“No, nothing.”

She muttered in a low tone. She now knew just how outmatched she was. Sure, she could kill Hilma, maybe even this Satoru, but then what? Let the kingdom completely fall apart? Who knew how many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, would die as a consequence of her action.

To have a whole kingdom fall apart due to her actions didn't sit well with her... not at all... the thought of that only brought up old painful memories and emotions she thought she had long forgotten and grew cold toward.

She glanced once more outside the window of the room. She did not know what to do anymore. For all she arrived here with nothing but surety and possible actions that would need to be taken, she now found herself doubting all she previously thought certain.

She found herself even slightly excited at the thought of meeting this Satoru, this man who accomplished so much in such short a time. She thought such emotions were all but dead within her, maybe it was just her old memories resurfacing that brought up this long-forgotten side of herself.

'Satoru, just who are you?' that was the question she was sure she would not let unanswered at the end of all of this, no matter how much time it took, she would have her answer.

{Alysanne's P.O.V.}

"You should try this Your Highness! It is truly delicious!"

The noble lady just a few years younger than her excitedly proposed while handing her one of the cups filled with a mixture of ingredients she wasn't very familiar with.

"What is it?"

The princess questioned while observing the mixture with some doubt.

“Your Highness, this is one of the most famous dishes at the moment, it is a mixture of grinded ice, honey, sugar and a juice of your preference, it is perfect for hot days such as this.”

Another noble lady, Clarice, answered her. She rather liked this one, she was always updated on the newest fashion of the moment.

“What flavor would you prefer?”

Asked again the excitable Angelica, the younger of her current companions.

“Uhm, do you have peach flavor?”

Alysanne asked as the handmaiden in all but name nodded enthusiastically.

These days the company of those two was the only thing that stopped her from descending into madness. Not counting her secret meeting with Lord Erik of course.

The two of them first approached her a couple months ago. At first she had been pretty reluctant in spending time with them although they had been pretty persistent and that pushed her only further away.

All changed after her fallout with her betrothed, she had cried herself to sleep that day and the next did not have the strength to refuse the two’s offer of sharing an afternoon in the gardens.

She was ready to be belittled or shamed like many other times before, but to her surprise, the two of them did not do so. Instead, they have been very supporting and cheered her up from her bad mood. Ever since then, the three of them had met almost daily. She found those common moments of sharing much gratifying,

like nothing ever before. Was this how it felt to have friends? She wondered that often during the last weeks.

“Here it is Your Highness!”

Angelica exclaimed as she finished mixing all the ingredients with a teaspoon.

“Angie, I told you many times to call me Alys, no need for formalities when there are only the three of us.”

She said as the stubbornness of the free-spirited girl, while quite endearing, could be annoying at times.

The noble lady just bowed her head with a pleasant smile, saying nothing more.

The princess took a spoonful of the mixture and brought her to her lips. To say the taste was an explosion of flavors and sweetness was an understatement, it was the most delicate thing she ever tasted. So cold but at the same time refreshing, she swallowed it contently with a huge smile forming on her face.

“This is indeed delicious.”

She admitted much to the younger lady’s glee and the older’s amusement.

Clarice moved her blond hair aside as she turned toward her.

“Next time you should try the melon flavor... Alys.”

The noblewoman hesitated a moment before saying her nickname out loud. The only people who ever used it were her father when she was younger and, more recently, Erik during their secret meetings.

Alysanne smiled as she took another spoonful of the strange but delicious mixture and enjoyed its taste even more.

“How did you learn of this?”

She asked the both of them as she was sure that she never heard of such a new dessert around the capital.

“Ah it is very simple, the idea originates from Marquis Satoru’s territory, as my family’s land is right next to its border we were invested by the new fashion’s enthusiasm as soon as it exploded.”

Clarice explained, she was the only daughter of Count Valois and was loved by her father so it would only be natural for him to inform her of such things.

That news slightly soured the sweet taste in Alysanne’s mouth even if she tried to hide it. To hear yet again how amazing her husband to be was did not serve to better her mood at all as she could do nothing but remember their last disastrous encounter.

She had been extremely mad that time, she acted without thinking and soured their relationship even more. Not that she cared for him or anything but in the end she would be the one to marry him and so, having that kind of relationship degrade in such a way only made her shudder at the thought of what he would do to her once they were married.

For all she was a princess she knew even her father would hardly stop him except in extreme cases. After all, for all he tried to make himself look like the king and ultimate power in the kingdom, Alysanne was sure even he could not control the magic caster, he was just too powerful even for her father to oppose.

She was only a mean to stop him from taking the throne by force and overthrowing the royal line.

“For me the situation is similar, although it was my older brother who told me of the new fashion through one of his letters!”

Angie added her own version of the answer to her previous question.

Angelica herself was the only daughter of Count Orleans, their territory laying exactly near Clarice’s family and also bordering with Satoru’s.

“So, so, Alys, you are betrothed to the Marquis, what kind of man is he? I never had the occasion of meeting him!”

Angelica pushed the conversation into another direction she did not expect. Cold, cruel and ruthless were the first adjectives coming to Alysanne’s mind to describe the man, though she was pretty sure she could not say so, not even to her friends.

“My father told me he is a very composed and business-oriented man, the first thing he did after putting his land in an acceptable state was to establish business relations with all the nearing territories, but I wouldn’t presume to know him better than his betrothed.”

Clarice added her contribution to the conversation, surprising Alysanne who did not know such a thing at all. She was pretty sure the only thing he did was intimidate people with his thugs and deal with adventurers, which were mostly nearly as brutish as him.

She hesitated a moment before finally deciding on a course of action.

“Me and Marquis Satoru are very different in many aspects, we only spoke an handful of times, I know little more than anybody else on his persona.”

That was a very diluted and courteous way of admitting she had no idea about any of his preferences or thoughts.

Now the two of them were looking at her with an expression the princess could not decipher.

“Is that so? That just won’t do Alys.”

Angie’s tone was totally different from her previous cheerful one. She seemed almost disappointed but before the princess could say anything else, Clarice joined in their exchange.

“That is indeed unfortunate, it is not good to not know the man you will have to deal with for the rest of your life.”

She admonished placing a hand on her shoulder.

“B-but he is the one who should come and ask me-“

The princess stuttered out in a mutter will averting her gaze.

“Uhm, Marquis Satoru doesn’t seem like someone interested in courtship... maybe a different approach would be needed...”

Clarice said as she sat next to Alysanne, eliciting this last one’s curiosity.

“What do you mean?”

The princess asked eager to know what her new friend had to say.

“Well, well, my own betrothed Jilk has the same sense of romanticism and courtship of a misshaped rock... though he enjoys horse riding and hunting, we ignored each other for years that is until I tried to speak to him about hunting and riding... I swear the eagerness and passion he put in every word made him seem like a completely different person from the one I imagined him as for years.”

The sole daughter of Count Valois explained with a small fond smile on her face.

“I had him wrapped around my finger in just a couple months from that moment... I even gifted him a new pureblooded stallion for his birthday a few months ago... He has been smitten with me since and always tries to please me and listen to me when he can, though I don’t think things would be like this if I didn’t take the first step.”

Hearing Clarice’s words made Alysanne contemplate her previous choices taken in her own relationship with her betrothed. Did she do something wrong? All her life she had been sure it would be the male part who should show interest toward the female and woo her. Maybe that was not exactly right in all cases...

It was then that it hit her. A realization long overdue and something that nudged on the back of her mind for far too long. ‘Is this why he keeps her around?!’ she asked no one but herself. It was true indeed, her half-sister was always eager to spend time with her betrothed, Alysanne had no idea what they spoke about to this day, but now she had her suspicions.

What did Satoru like? His business? Magic? Did the two of them share their knowledge? Or, more probably, her half-sister listened while he enjoyed talking about it, was that really all that took?

She never wasted time learning about her betrothed. Well, not more than it was necessary for the public eye. She knew about his business, his connections and his power. But she never pondered what such a man would be like or would enjoy outside that sphere.

“Alys, is everything alright?”

Angie asked in a seemingly worried tone. She had been probably silent for too long.

“Yes.”

She decided to answer synthetically. Not sure if she should elaborate, there has never been anyone she would trust enough to request help from.

“D-do you think you could help me? T-to try and understand Satoru?”

She swallowed her pride and decided to ask that question at last. Not that she was eager to please that monster of a man, but for all her heart belonged to someone else, she knew she would marry the Marquis in the end. She will not be stuck in an unlivable marriage where her husband would despise her and bring home children of other women.

She would have his respect and would make sure he would not stray away from his duties to her. And if she had to become what he wanted her to be for that to happen, then let it be so.

Her two friends seemed to hesitate as they glanced at each other seemingly unsure how to answer her request. That was until a look of silent agreement was shared between the two.

“It would be our honor to help you in this endeavor Alys.”

Clarice declared with a small smile gracing her visage.

“We will make that man surely fall for you.”

Angelica added with a mischievous smirk of her own.

And so, the unlikely alliance was born between three noble ladies sharing ice cream in the royal gardens.

A.N.

Eheheheh, look at that, the princess is far more resilient than she appeared. Though will she manage in her ultimate goal?

I will let you know that I have hidden two easter eggs in this chapter, one for anime fans and the other for historical nerds. Let's see if anyone can spot them!

Make sure to leave a comment/review and let me know your thoughts!

Stay safe! See you next time!