

Chapter 71: The Yields of Labors

I do not own Fate/Stay Night and stuffs.

o. o. o.

It had been a very long time since the Eighth Apostle Ancestor had felt this strongly about someone that he had only recently met and knew little about.

Not since he had been recently turned into a monster like the others and finding his way around their myriad of twisted and disastrous quirks. Altrouge's fae like demeanor. Chaos' dammed up tide of bestial monstrosities. Strout's near invincibility. Chahain being annoying as hell. Sumire being the lush wench that could drink his entire crew under the table. Tatari being... Tatari. Primate Murder being a damn fox dog squirrel that looked more suitable in a small child's room than the disaster that it was.

But... he had been prepared for them.

All the notable Apostle Ancestors knew and kept tabs on one another to some extent. Histories and powers. Moreso when it came to Altrouge and Ortenrosse considering they were the leaders of their factions. It enabled him to read up on them in his early years and at least get ready for the nonsense they brought about.

Or at least try.

This kid though. He was different. New. Even if Solomon had sponsored him to be the new Tenth, nobody had expected him to be this absurd.

He wasn't strong, but he knew how to hit hard enough to actually hurt.

He wasn't some spawn of long lost mystery, but he could still whip out shit from the Age of Gods literally from his body.

He wasn't a high class magus, but he still worked around and tore through the mysteries of others as though they weren't there.

He wasn't some phantom like assassin that was impossible to follow, but he was still whipping out tricks and moves that nobody caught until it was too late.

He wasn't an unstoppable martial master, but he was good enough to simply not *die* already despite the fact he had been up against the Parade.

The Pirate's mouth stretched into a snarl as his eyes scanned over the bay, to the hilt of the titanic

sword stuck down into the depths, and the teenager staring back at him with silver eyes that seemed to pierce through the night like a pair of laser pointers.

He wasn't on par with what was expected of an Ancestor... But he sure as hell wasn't human.

The Eighth Ancestor knew he wasn't the strongest of his kind. Many of his peers could easily surpass his power if forced to fight... but his mana capacity was naturally titanic, as was his natural capability to survive and recover from the vast majority of what the world could throw at him and his crew.

It had been a long time since anyone had genuinely hurt him. Hurt any of them in a way they could not recover from.

Word of this was going to spread, one way or another. Even if he threw caution to the wind and killed the brat right now.

His undead blood flowed. His hand reached for the sword still anchored in his chest...

“Fina. That’s enough.”

He went rigid as the one voice that could reach him sighed as if chastising a child.

“... Ma’am?” He didn't trust himself to say anything else at that moment, only giving his superior a sharp look.

“We did not come here to fight a war, and I still need you to serve as my escort back home.” Altrouge lamented as though she was not on the losing side of the exchange. “Even if you do turnabout the situation and gain us our Host’s allegiance, along with his Servant, it would not do us much. The Tenth’s condition is tremulous at best, and a Servant’s priority above all else is their Master’s safety.”

Meaning if someone tried to get smart, even if Shirou was officially on Altrouge’s side, he wouldn't be able to help her, and Saber would be too busy protecting him to contribute much.

What was more concerning was that she spoke of potential near future trials at all. The risk had always been there, but for her to actually dwell on them meant that a new factor must have been recognized to give her pause.

It wasn't Barthomelloi or Solomon. They were present and known powers before this disaster had been agreed to. Notable, but nothing Primate Murder couldn't handle.

Nobody was flaunting their power here either, so it wasn't as if there was some monster approaching...

A sudden chill traveled down the captain's spine. His eyes briefly darted over the coastline in either direction to see if he could point out anything that was amiss...

... Ah. *That* would certainly do it.

He glanced at the blonde Servant briefly, who was watching their exchange with an almost impassive mask, not that he blamed her for showing cracks at this stage. Whether or not the cracks were present due to the latest unexpected development though was anyone's guess.

The captain spat on the ground in annoyance. A crude, lowborne act, but he didn't care at this point. "Tch. Fine. Doesn't matter what the reason is. Luck or obnoxious planning. Hearing either as the truth would push me over regardless."

The spectators were a mixed bag. Some were blatantly confused as to what just happened. Some were clearly trying to figure it out. And some, like Solomon and Barthomeloi, were unreadable as usual.

"Apostle Svelton. Is that acknowledgement that-"

Saber's question was cut off by a lazy wave from the pirate. "Yeah yeah. I'm done. Your brat's got a notch in his belt. Hurry it up and tell him to put away that ridiculous true ether sword bomb of his, or whatever it's called, will you? And this annoying prick that he stuck in my chest. I've suddenly lost my appreciation for this damn island."

"That actually worked? Since when do the kid's bluffs not get called out?" The blue Servant, Lancer if he remembered right, frowned in confusion. Not that Fina blamed him. He HAD intended to continue with the fight until Altrouge stopped him.

"Since someone finally realized that he doesn't make empty threats when everything is on the verge of going to hell. Now shut up before he changes his mind." The Servant's Enforcer Master hissed under her breath.

"Saber, if you don't mind."

"He has received word, Lady Brunestud." The Servant reported. Off in the distance, those with properly enhanced eyesight could see Shirou take his thumb off of the grip of the still fully charged sword in his hand and slowly returned the tool to the back of his belt.

He didn't look good. With a body littered with cuts, blood, and salt, not to mention *another* gaping hole over his heart, it was a wonder that the teen could manage to stay on his two feet.

"You think he's going to need a lift back? Winner or not, he looks like shit," Lancer asked the

question that at least a couple of them were thinking but knew better than to voice.

“For his sake he better not. I’ve been humiliated enough for one night.” Fina muttered under his breath.

“Wait, he’s turning around?” Rin narrowed her eyes to try and see Shirou slowly staggering away from shore clearer. “What’s he doing?”

Only those with the best sight there managed to spot the teen stop next to the grip of the titanic sword sticking out of the ocean and lean against it, breathing heavily. It was blatantly clear something was bothering-

He rammed his right arm into the hole in his chest.

“What on earth?!” Luvial balked, not the only one visibly surprised by his action. “Is he trying to kill himself?!”

“Considering he has to deal with Barthomelloi soon after this debacle, one might consider he’s taking the easy way out,” Merem merely tilted his head to the side in minor curiosity before realizing something before the others, “Ah. No. False alarm.”

It was hard to tell for most there, but those with good eyes watched as Shirou ripped his hand out of his chest again, throwing a rather sizeable and bloody chunk of crystal away from himself wildly, coughing and leaning heavily against the grip of the sword moments later.

“Looks like Jericho left him a present before he managed to push her out.” Altrouge observed idly. “It must have been rather distracting having that next to his lungs and heart like that. I would have done the same.”

Rin turned slightly green at how casual Altrouge had admitted she’d gorge out her chest cavity with her bare hands to get rid of a foreign object, as though it was a meaningless and effortless task to do so.

Shirou’s chest had already been a mess with one hand rammed through it. Partial vampire and Avalon or not, there weren’t many that envied the state he had rendered himself in after literally giving himself an encore. It was genuinely astounding that he was still conscious as far as most were concerned.

“Gotta give him props, he’s still standing. Not easy to just ram your hand in there like that and not white out,” Lancer’s offhand compliment didn’t go missed. “Hey Saber, you sure he doesn’t need help? It might take a while if we leave him like this.”

“Just wait.” The King of Knights firmly stated in a tone that brokered no argument, which

apparently was enough for the Hound of Ireland to shrug casually and say no more.

They watched as Shirou panted and coughed up some more blood for almost twenty more seconds before he managed to recover enough to stand straight again.

He then turned to his side and lifted up his right arm, since he couldn't move his left on the count of his abused and still mutilated left pectoral muscle, and managed to muster enough mana to materialize a meter wide broad sword that just hovered motionlessly mid air with the flat of its blade faced the earth and sky respectively.

He then heavily sat on the sword as though it was a chair, the tool not sinking or budging from the action.

More importantly though, was when he leaned to his side, his arm stretched out as though to grab the titanic weapon that he had fought on-

THUMP.

The entire bay area pulsed hollowly as the massive blade retracted instantly and almost comically if it was any other situation, causing a vacuum that forced the atmosphere that immediately demanded a correction.

The effect was automatic, as the collapsing air pressure caused a miniature bomb-like effect that shattered the salt flows in the water, putting pressure on everyone's bounded fields, and as some would learn later, shattering windows and infrastructure near the coastline.

It was not nearly enough for the monsters currently present to witness Shirou, with some effort after managing to remain on his floating perch in the air, sheathe away a familiar white sword back into the scabbard on his hip.

"Not interfering my ass." Fina muttered under his breath, giving the Vice Director a dirty glare, which was promptly ignored.

Whatever other issues and comments the Pirate was going to make was cut off as a familiar golden chain immediately materialized from one of the buildings on the docks straight to Shirou, who immediately wrapped his end around the cross guard of the improvised platform, before the golden tool began to retract itself, pulling its maker along with it.

It wasn't exactly a fancy, elegant, or flashy way to return to shore, but it was efficient and got the job done considering the teen's current condition.

"If nothing else, that stubborn child is remarkably resourceful." Altrouge eyed the chain with some curiosity. "If I'm not mistaken, that golden piece is another Divine Construct. One I have

not seen of similar make and potency in quite some time. I wonder, is that child's repository merely a result of extensive travels, this war, or is something else afoot?"

"If you are insinuating the Church was involved in his development, I recommend you keep your straw grasping fantasies to yourself." Merem waved away her accusations with a bored expression. "I assure you, had that been the case, Shirou would have used at least some tools of catholic origin against Svelton for some extra insult to injury. Unless you desire to insult your escort by insinuating that his opponent was holding back?"

"Careful with your words Solomon. The brat's tricks or not, I still have more than enough reserves to cause you and your monsters a few headaches." Fina grunted, his eyes and teeth nearly shining with irritation in the night.

"Is that right, Svelton? Because from where I'm sitting, you don't look too good." Merem's blue eyes shone just as intensely, if not more. "Are you certain you desire to disregard your obligations now of all times?"

Tang.

The sound of Saber tapping her invisible sword against the concrete met everyone's ears.

"That's enough, both of you. There has been enough pointless fighting for one night. Remember your obligations and vows, for your pride and those you consider your allies, if nothing else."

Altrouge nodded in agreement. "Hmm. Hmm. Well said, King of Knights. Truly you know what it's like to keep boys like that in line. You must have had plenty of experience with your forces."

Saber didn't bother gracing her with a response.

"Tch." Fina had trouble keeping his tongue quiet.

"That said, I'm truly most disappointed with you Solomon. Giving the boy the title of Tenth when he's clearly more suited for the Twenty Fifth. Had Be'ze still been alive, they no doubt would have killed to have him as an apprentice."

"We both know Be'ze only taught apprentices, and never turned anyone personally. Why else is the Twenty Fifth seat still vacant," Merem rolled his eyes. "Regardless, unfortunately there were some precedents that took priority in that Louvre was the fool that turned him in the first place. The daughter at least."

Few noticed the glint of interest in Barthomelloi's eyes as the conversation went on.

Fina looked like he smelled something rancid. "The brat's not up to snuff, but he's better than

Ortenrosse's castaway fodder. Did she get a lucky bite in before getting skewered or something?"

"Hostage situation, actually. Before Lancer's Master did the killing blow. The other two were dealt with shortly afterwards. They took particular offense to losing one of their own." Merem shrugged. "But at the very least, Louvre was easily addressed, meaning our new friend has no noteworthy strings attached."

All the vampires there pointedly ignored Lorelei glaring daggers at them.

Yup. No strings whatsoever.

"Ah. That said, it certainly wouldn't have worked this time." Merem cheerfully added as though he just remembered something entertaining. "The Servants summoned for this war are quite diverse in all sorts of curious ways."

It was at that moment that Fina realized that he couldn't sense any of the twenty five men that he had sent out into the city earlier that day for "insurance".

At all.

"... Crown. What did you do?"

The Twentieth Ancestor's smile widened. "What are you talking about Svelton? I've been here the entire time. I assure you, I truly have not done a thing since you or your men arrived here save for providing entertaining commentary."

It was all but blatantly obvious that something horrific had happened to the Pirate's special forces. Something that Solomon knew would do damage just as permanent, if not long lasting, as the cursed corrupted plight of a Servant that had interfered during the battle.

"Fina. I said that's enough. We can discuss what transpired elsewhere later." Altrouge sighed. She really had no one but herself to blame for the additional losses. She had allowed Fina to get overconfident and send a few extra men for "surveillance", knowing full well that the enemy was waiting for them and likely expected something like this...

Still, for another entity to potentially kill off parts of her subordinate for good so casually... what was the name of that person the boy asked to take the Servant away? Sakura?

Hmmm. Well, it probably was too late to ask about these intriguing mystery factors in this city now. She'd probably find out about most of them later regardless with a little investigation, but it was frustrating nonetheless.

She spied the boy gradually approaching, a little over halfway to shore. A bit slow for her tastes,

but he was clearly exhausted and the hole in his chest was only halfway healed. His healing potential was without question founded in some mystery other than the usual method of reversing time that most Apostles utilized. Powerful, but dreadfully slow.

Still, she had an image to maintain, especially with Barthomelloi and the King of Knights watching. It wouldn't do to get impatient just yet. And if she played her cards right she might just get something favorable from this night after all.

o. o. o.