

"Normal speech"

'Thought'

Status/written text

(Silent magic)

[Normal magic]

{Change of location, time or POV}

Hey there! It was about time for an intermission don't you think?

Let's see what our dear side characters are up to!

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

Intermission III: From Top to Bottom

Raeven marched down and up the corridor like a madman, his paranoia at an all time high, unjustly so in his own humble opinion. After all there was no reason behind his nervousness but his first child being born in one of the rooms down this hall.

He was just a little nervous since the child was being born early, yes, that was it! It would be a shame for the child to die and waste precious time! If that happened, he would need to wait for his wife to get over her grief and then another 9 excruciating months of pregnancy. No, that was just a gargantuan waste of time, he needed a heir, a political instrument, as soon as possible.

In a sense, he was glad this child was being born early, though the healers told him such a premature birth could lead to

complications in the future. That would not be optimal in normal circumstances, but these were far from normal circumstances anyway. An all-out war was about to commence, he could feel it.

Now that Satoru was gone, it would be the right moment to make a move. Blumrush had been far too silent for his comfort in the last months, the man was far too deep into the Empire's pockets to ever care for how his actions would affect the feeble stability the Kingdom has achieved after the massacre.

Pespea was no better either, the man was turning his territory inside out to try and catch Satoru's men, but that was a foolish endeavor that would only bring to further misery for himself. Raeven had already experienced that for himself, his territory was compromised, and it had been for far longer than he had thought. The only thing he could do was limit the damages and give boundaries not to be crossed to the spies operating on his land.

You killed one of them? You would have a revolt in your hand the next day, workers would not work, sailors would burn their patrons' ships, it was madness. Even he had to concede his defeat after a few months of economic recession. Pespea will soon learn not to get in the way.

He sighed heavily, releasing part of his tension, the only reason why both of them didn't invade the absent Marquis' territory was only due to the fact they already had too much to deal with in their own territories.

Low skill workers, in particular, migrated in masses toward the new Marquis' territory due to the favorable labor laws there. That heavily crippled the economic situation of the northern and southern nobles.

He would have suffered the same fate if it wasn't for his own foresight and his adaptability to the situation. He basically copied the same laws the magic caster set for his lands. That had been a lifesaver. For all he loathed the accursed caster, Raeven had to admit the man knew how to pull the strings of people's hearts. A usually useless talent if not mixed with a great deal of political and military power, something the man possessed in seemingly endless reserves.

For all he hated him, he could not refrain from admitting he was his greatest opponent as of yet. In just a couple of years, a no name man became the most important figure in the whole kingdom, his influence even reaching to other countries.

A pained scream broke his contemplation suddenly making him come back to his current predicament. Yes, he needed to focus on this right now, he could ponder the caster's moves later on.

Without much noble pretense he marched down the hall and barged through the door of the birthing chamber. His wife was laying on the bed, pain could be read all over her face as her legs were spread as healers ran all around her trying to not make her move during the procedure.

"My Lord, you should-"

The healer who tried to stop him was frozen solid by his gaze.

"What is the situation?"

He asked calmly as his gaze continued to dart between the healers and his pained wife. For all he was inexperienced, he would have never thought this amount of pain was required to give birth.

"Ah, My Lord... the child... the child is not upside down."

The words of the healer elicited a scowl from the usually stone faced noble. 'That is not good, not good at all' he heard his fair share of births gone wrong due to that reason.

"Do your job, I will observe from here, if you screw something up... be sure there will be hell to pay."

The woman almost fled from his proximity at his words. This would be a long extenuating wait, he gazed at his wife's eyes, pain, that he could read just fine, but there was something else below that, a determination he rarely saw in any woman he had known before.

Were those her motherly instincts acting up? He had no idea. Whatever it was, it better help.

Without anything else he could do, he sat down on a nearby chair.

'Not even eight months in the womb and crawling out in the wrong position... child of mine, you are already y such a troublemaker' he allowed that little amusing thought to wonder his mind for the briefest of moments.

And now, he could do nothing but wait and see.

...

He had no idea when he exactly fell into a trance but he was woken up from it nonetheless when he heard a shrill sound enter his ears.

His head snapped up as he gazed at the scene before him, two healers were using healing magic on his wife while another was gently moving around and working on something in his arms.

He immediately stood up, he had no idea how he should feel now that he was a father, all he could describe was a certain numbness encompassing his mind.

“It is a boy, My Lord.”

The healer said as he wrapped the newborn baby into a clean towel before slowly and carefully handling the child to him.

He was small, incredibly small, that was probably due to his early birth. He was still bald, it was probably too early for him to sprout any hair.

“My Lord.”

The healer whispered attracting once more the Marquis’ gaze.

“The child is frail, it is very possible he will not survive the next winter, that is if it survives for so long at all.”

The man said seriously making the Marquis sigh internally as he already thought on his next move. If the boy was meant to die, he would have to use his short lifespan to make sure his wife got pregnant again before his death would hit her. That should at least optimize the time he had at his disposal.

‘Is it even worth it to give him a name?’ the marquis wondered as his gaze returned to the child in his arms.

In that moment the child’s’ eyes fluttered open, revealing a pair of pale blue eyes most similar to his own. The child’s toothless mouth opened into a smile or maybe a sign of amazement and curiosity, Raeven wasn’t sure, though, in that moment, he felt something strange.

The numbness in his mind was slowly disappearing, being replaced by an all-encompassing warmth that spread all over his body in a matter of seconds.

He never felt such a thing before, such a powerful emotion, the desire to protect something or someone so fiercely. In comparison his desire for the throne could be considered like a childish thing.

‘What is this?’ he wondered, not knowing how he should react to such a powerful pull toward someone. If he didn’t know any better, he would say someone casted some type of spell on him.

“Gah!”

The child cried out as he looked up at him. That was his last straw as his expression loosened and a smile blossomed on his face. He couldn’t even retell when was the last time he smiled naturally and not for some curtesy.

What was even the point in sitting on that stupid chair anymore? Would he even feel half as happy as he felt right now when he sat on it?

In an instant the boy in his arms began tearing up and then started wailing. He immediately panicked, he might have hurt the child by accident while he was distracted with his stupid thoughts.

His head immediately snapped to the healer, expecting some explanation on how to proceed from there.

“My Lord, the child probably wants his mother.”

The man offered as the smile on Raeven’s face disappeared. He reluctantly proceeded to do as the healer instructed and carefully placed the child in his wife’s ready arms as if he was the most delicate of crystals.

As the child proceeded to stop his wailing and snuggle against his mother’s bosom, the Marquis turned toward the healer closing the

distance between the two of them. He was quite taller than the stout man which further served as an intimidation tactic.

“Make sure the child survives by any means necessary, tell me whatever you need, and I will have it delivered to you.”

He instructed in his coldest tone as a dangerous glint appeared in his eyes.

“Fail me and what Marquis Satoru did to the Noble Faction will seem tame in comparison to what I will do to all of you.”

He growled out lowly so that only the healer could hear him. The man immediately proceeded to eagerly nod.

“Good, now leave us.”

He said those last words louder so that all the occupants of the room could hear him and obey.

He was soon left alone with his wife and his son who was already fast asleep.

As his eyes fell on the slumbering and peaceful visage of his son he could not help but feel his heart melt in tenderness at the scene.

He had truly been a vain man, how could he have ever thought that the throne would be the ultimate prize in this world? He even thought of using his son as some disposable tool to reach his goal, that was nothing but utter foolishness.

“He is beautiful, my Lord.”

His wife muttered as she gently stroked the baby’s cheek with one finger. In that moment he could not have agreed more with his wife.

“How will we name him?”

She asked once more making his mind think of any possible name that would be adapt to such a miracle.

“Rifan Maven Dale Raeven.”

He finally decided, making sure to add his wife’s family name as it was curtesy in case the line died out and so the boy would have a claim to it.

“A beautiful name.”

His wife said simply, too transfixed with the baby to give him too much care, not that he could blame her.

He will have to rearrange his plans, the baby’s safety took priority, let the Hands be as long as they stayed away from his mansion and his son. Otherwise, there would be hell to pay, and no magic caster in the world would stop him.

{Ro-Lente}

{Goldfinger’s P.O.V.}

The balding man silently cursed the Master of Metal, that man would be the end of him, a close second to the Master of Carts, twisted man that he was.

Ever since that faithful day he felt like he had been cornered without a way to escape his situation. He, who once led the Merchant Guild into prosperity, now was reduced to a mere tool, and head figure without value if not his ability and cunning in the mediation department.

In that moment, he didn’t feel like Goldfinger, powerful and respected. No, nowadays he felt like his old self, Aruma, the bastard child of the Vanheim noble family, a good for nothing.

Despised by his father and whose mother preferred death over having to care for him.

Powerless and foolish, those were adjectives he thought would have never been applicable to him anymore. But he was apparently wrong.

He had been played, and not by anyone, but by the same man he initially thought would be a great asset for the Guild. And he had indeed been, before deciding he wanted to take over it.

Now he was relegated to this honorary position, filling up paperwork without any decisional power anymore.

‘Grandfather, I failed you’ he admitted reluctantly gritting his teeth.

His grandfather, former headhouse of the Vanheim family, the only man who ever cared for him, the man who taught him everything he knew and that set him up for greatness in this world.

The man who had him swore that he would hold his head high and face life with pride. For all that man had long been dead, as was Aruma’s accursed father, he could not help but feel like he had failed him.

The same man who wiped out the entire Vanheim’s noble line was also responsible for taking over the guild he had built up in the last 20 years. It was utterly infuriating to think of, it was like spitting on his grandfather’s legacy.

A knock on his door interrupted his depressing train of thought. He already knew who it was, the only one who still could manage to bring out a true smile from him these days.

“Silvy, come in.”

The door opened to reveal the form of a young woman in the making.

“Good afternoon gramps.”

The irreverent voice of the girl brought a chuckle out of him. She was young and beautiful, barely sixteen with long reddish hair and green eyes, so similar to his own.

“You look each day more like your mother... you even got her sharp tongue.”

Goldfinger lamented as his granddaughter placed down on his desk the tea tray she was carrying, before proceeding to pour the tea for both of them.

“Rose petals and cinnamon, your favorite.”

Aruma silently thanked her mindfulness, for all he was proud of her, he could not help but see her mother every time he looked at her.

His greatest failure.

He was foolish and arrogant at the time, not even twenty when he got a present from one of the prostitutes he usually frequented at the time. He was in his prime, he had no time to care for a child, that was the reasoning that brought him to leave the child at an orphanage.

He promised himself he would come back when the time was right, and his position secured. Years passed and he climbed up the ladder, always sparing an eye to check his daughter was well cared for.

But he was too careless, too self-centered.

She disappeared from the orphanage from one day to another. It took weeks for him to be informed. He confronted the orphanage patrons, they set him up on a false track not knowing who he was.

It took months for him to understand so, when he did his fury was something to behold. After days of torture, he finally discovered the truth. One of the most powerful merchants in the city bought his daughter for his own sick entertainment.

He hunted that bastard for months, burning down his establishments until he finally cornered him. Once he disposed of that trash the only thing he found was a dead body of a young girl who died in childbirth and said newly born child.

He scowled for a moment as those memories resurfaced and he forced them back down. He sipped his tea, that should help him.

He would never make the same mistake again. He took care of the child, grooming her into a perfect woman capable of frightful cunning and ruthlessness when necessary.

“Gramps, is everything okay?”

The voice of his granddaughter definitely snapped him back to reality.

“Yes, yea, I’m just too old for this.”

He brushed her concerns aside eliciting a chuckle from the young woman.

“The day I believe that is the day I will be queen.”

She mocked while moving her smooth hair aside.

“I heard that the magic caster is having problems with his betrothed.”

If Aruma knew her as well as he did that was a statement that sounded awfully like a prelude.

“Silvy, don’t.”

He said sternly.

“Why not? You initially mentioned I would probably marry him in the future.”

She protested with a pout on her face. He had indeed said such a thing, but that was before he took over the guild, before the massacre, when the magic caster was only a successful merchant with great prospects ahead of him. At that time he considered marrying his little Silvy to him, the most powerful and rich Master of the guild, and also the youngest.

At the time Silvy was too young even to propose a betrothal, though he had spoken of the idea to her, with some foresight, he shouldn’t have done that. His granddaughter was far too similar to him for his liking. Proud and thinking herself the smartest, a troublesome combination that only brought to one result, ambition and arrogance. And while the former wasn’t a problem, the latter certainly was, and he could speak from experience.

“That is not a man to be trifled with, you will get yourself in deep troubles... or even worse.”

He warned, but for all his words where received, he might as well have spoken to a wall.

“I often wonder how such a man is like, what pass through his mind while doing certain things and does he see the world...”

Silvy mused as she sipped her tea.

“A dangerous thought, you should beware those who rise to the top by stepping on corpses... of foes and allies alike.”

The man in the second half of his fifties said.

“I always enjoyed mysteries.”

The girl stated an amused smile on her face.

{E-Libera}

{Edstrom's P.O.V.}

The sound of a shovel penetrating the ground broke the silence of dusk. Dirt moved aside in an ever-growing pile on the side of the pit.

The rhythmical sound of the shovel rubbing against the ground had been going on since this afternoon, the seemingly untirable boy continued to shove aside load after load without uttering a single word or a breath of exhaustion.

She had offered her help of course, the boy just said nothing and ignored her leaving her no choice but to observe.

The almost 13 years old assassin ravaged the earth beneath him like he wanted to kill it with each shovelful of dirt he took from it.

Sometimes Edstrom wondered if it just wouldn't it have been better for the boy to die in the alley, he was recruited in. A cruel thought, but wouldn't that be a mercy compared to what he had to go through these last years?

Still, she was a selfish woman, she wouldn't have it any other way, no matter how painful it was, that boy had been a great solace in her life, making her forget her darkest days with his innocence.

She looked as the boy finally shoved the digging instrument aside and went toward the body covered just by a white veil that laid on the ground not far from the hole.

There were no tears on the boy's face as he carefully grabbed the body and lowered it inside the hole, but the dead expression he sported on his face was far worse than any hysterical crying or raging Edstrom could imagine.

"Climb."

She didn't even notice her body acting on her own as she grasped the boy's shoulder and whispered his name worriedly.

The blond-haired boy just gave her a glance, an unfocussed look in his eyes. A look belonging to someone who lost everything dear to him in the world.

Edstrom remembered a time where she could see only smiles on that childish and delicate face. A time when her, Rina, Cris and Climb would joke and laugh while they drank, a time that seemed a life away but in truth was not even two years in the past.

When the square incident happened, she thought she had lost Climb, he had been unresponsive for so long afterwards and Cris developed a panic induced phobia of crowded places.

Yet, after a while she could see signs of both boys coming back to their former selves, scarred but unbroken. That was until this morning, they found Cris dead in his bed.

According to the healer, he ingested an absurd amount of the medicine he had been prescribed with for his panic attacks. That had been no accident, he chose to end his life, just like that, out of the blue.

Climb didn't even cry, he just closed into his shell, that was the thing that scared her the most. If Climb went too, she would be left alone... again, alone. She couldn't allow that, she would not suffer the same pain she did before, it would tear her apart, she knew so.

In the end she was truly a selfish being, to wish for someone's affection only for the fear of loneliness.

"Let me do it."

She offered but the boy didn't answer her, he just moved aside grabbing the shovel from the ground and proceeding to begin refilling the pit he created with dirt. Load after load, the covered body disappeared under a pile of mud, grass, and other things, never to be seen again.

The cold dead indifference in Climb's blue eyes mortified her, she wanted to hug the boy, but judging by his previous responses, that might not be the right choice.

By the time he was done, the sun had already gone down and the moon was rising.

"He would have liked this spot, he came here all the times... it got crowded at the base."

She said, Climb just shrugged.

"I guess, though, he would have preferred being alive."

The blond boy spoke for the first time since they discovered Cris' body.

"You want to offer a prayer for him?"

She asked, she was not pious woman, but she knew that faith was a form of comfort for the soul.

“What for? His body will be eaten by maggots, prayer or not.”

The boy rebutted stoically.

This was not the Climb she knew, this was far worse than the silence and rage after Rina.

“Prayers are worthless words, the gods do not exist... or if they exist, they are egoistical pieces of shit unworthy of worship.”

Climb continued without ever glancing in her direction leaving her speechless, not by the blasphemy in itself of course, but the concept bringing the boy to such a conclusion.

The boy moved aside, shovel still in hand, going straight for one of the few trees in the area.

Without any further words or signs of what was to come, Climb began to savagely smash his shovel against the tree as if he was beating the living shit out of the cause of all his suffering. When the shovel was unable to take such a mistreatment anymore it broke down, but that didn't deter the boy who started beating the tree with his own bare hands. An indescribable rage filling each of his blows.

Edstrom wasn't ashamed to say she had flinched at the first blow and was terrified by the last, in her whole life she had never seen someone exude such violence and wrath and yet not utter a single sound or cry out in pain.

Nonetheless, she moved and hugged the boy from behind.

“Stop it! You are going to destroy yourself like that!”

She cried out. Surprisingly, after just a few instances of reluctance, the boy actually stopped his savage beating which was certainly hurting him more than it was the tree.

“Why, why Edstrom? Why must we suffer so?... what sadistic and shitty bastard would wish such a thing upon us?”

She had no idea what to answer the boy, all she could do was offer comfort she hoped would be enough, no, it had to be enough, for the alternative was far too horrible even to consider thinking.

‘Let it go, let it out...’ those were the words she wanted to say but she had not the heart or courage to do so.

They remained like that, she hugging him until tiredness finally took its toll.

Truly, life was the worst.

A.N.

Shorter chapter, but this is a Intermission after all, and I have started working on this year’s anniversary special.

Let me know your thoughts in the comments!

Till next time! Stay safe!