Note: This chapter is a little longer than usual. Hope you don’t mind it.

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Themis’s ears pricked at the strong, bassist sounds that exploded into a series of medium-high pitched notes that sounded almost as if it was supposed to be covered by a young lady’s voice. That Klavier was at it again, playing the piano when he was badly injured. She opened her eyes, willed herself to move only to remain paralyzed on the spot, staring at an olive green canvas that was held up by metal poles. There wasn’t the burning wood smell common in Bariura empire’s air. It smelled so fresh that it gave her goosebumps. She strained her neck, staring down at her body that was bandaged everywhere except on the limbs. Wait. There wasn’t any doctor in their group, was there?

“Vital signs at optimal state,” a voice murmured. “Patient is now in conscious state.”

Themis turned to the side where she heard the voice, gazing at a woman of similar size to Michele’s. Apart from the straight face she pulled with almost no effort, the clothing had no signs of creases. It had to be metal, the kind that was so flexible that there was no need for leather which was commonly found in Will and Aem’s armor sets.

“Who is she?” Themis asked.

“Meet Lilith,” Michele said, putting down massive log by her side, her whole body covered in sweat as though she just completed a running marathon. “She’s the one who took care of you when Klavier couldn’t do it.”

“Klavier’s the one who took care of me?”

“Yeah. Klavier said that you almost died from excessive bleeding. He somehow managed to pull through using an ancient healing spell, but it wasn’t enough to completely cover the wounds. So he got this lady to do the job since she knows better.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Lilith said with a semi-monotonous tone. “Patient’s condition is now stable. Beginning final medical check up phase.”

Lilith pulled a small, white rectangle-like item that had a smooth silver tip from her underarm, pointing the tip at Themis’s face before shoving it into her mouth. She stared at the block numbers in the middle of the object rise up in a steady pace. After what felt like a minute had passed, the meter stopped moving up, giving out a loud beep sound.

“Body temperature at thirty-seven degrees celsius. No fever indicated. Patient at healthy state,” Lilith pulled the thing out of Themis’s mouth. “Initiating final check on vital signs.”

Lilith moved in so close that their noses was just an inch away from touching. Themis’s face reddened as she arched backwards, bumping her head against the bed frame.

“Please do not move,” Lilith touched Themis’s chin. “Eyes in perfect condition,” she snapped her fingers at Themis’s ear. “Ears in perfect condition.”

“Woah. You didn’t need to go *that* far…”

“Speech in perfect condition.”

“Okay, she’s crazy. Get off me! You’re creeping me out!” Themis shoved her aside.

“Final check on vital signs currently incomplete,” Lilith insisted on her close contact. “Please do not move.”

“Waaah!”

“Stop the useless struggle,” Michele said. “She can’t do her work if you keep fidgeting.”

“F-Fine,” Themis swallowed hard, staring right back at Lilith on the eye, ignoring soft giggles that drilled into her ear.

“Check on vital signs complete,” Lilith withdrew. “No anomalies detected, patient is now healthy but recommended to rest for full recovery.”

“Quite a mouthful there,” Themis pushed Lilith’s head away.

“Hey Klavier,” Michele beckoned him over. “She’s alright now.”

“Wait,” Themis looked at Klavier suspiciously. “Where did he get the grand piano from?”

“Um, it’s originally a tank,” Michele scratched her head. “Klavier discovered it is capable of transforming into almost anything he wants it to be so long as he call its name.”

“That is?”

“Duel-GX,” the mentioning of its name caused the piano to reform the machine into a crab-like creature.

“Hey!” Klavier shouted. “I was at the middle of the song!”

“Heh, save it for later. For you information, Themis is awake already.”

“Oh!” Klavier bounced to her side, staring at Themis at various angles as though she was his art model.

“Get off me,” she stomped on his face. “You’re seriously creeping me out.”

“My bad,” he stepped back. “I couldn’t help myself.”

“Who do you think I am, huh? I’m tougher than I look.”

“Brave words from a kid like you,” he ruffled her hair. “Well, we’re glad that you’re back in the team. Will was especially worried since you were out for nearly a month.”

“A month. What? A month?”

“Yeah. That really worried Will to no end. At least now he can be assured.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s surveying the safest path for us to walk on later. Aem, on the other hand, has gone ahead to alert Sama kingdom of our incoming presence.”

“Why would he do that?”

“We need to get supplies as soon as we can. He’s helping us negotiate the terms so we can get what we need for the journey. As of now, whatever we have will last for one more day and that includes the medicine you need.”

“I’ll be fine with some magic,” she puffed her cheeks.

“Sure. But can you cast it now?”

“I can try,” she raised her hand over to her back. She closed her eyes, focusing all the concentration she could give to her fingertips. It normally would take just a few seconds to feel the tingling sensation, but she wasn’t experiencing it.

“Warning!” Lilith elbowed Klavier aside, readjusting her arm back to her front. “Patient’s magical integrity reaching critical level!”

“What?”

“In other words,” Klavier said, rubbing his swollen cheek. “Shida busted the magic flow in your body with that stab, preventing any form of magic from being cast. Lilith said that you’ll need roughly a month to fully recover your magical power so in the meantime, do take a good rest.”

“Oh. Okay…”

The smile looked utterly ridiculous on him, almost as though she was looking at a five year old child with that innocent grin after messing the place up with crayon marks. For a moment, her mind flashed a memory where she saw a kid of exactly the same expression before her consciousness knocked her on the head.

“Aw,” Michele poked her cheek. “Did I just see someone get mushy all of a sudden?”

“Wh-Who is?” Themis asked.

“I’m looking at *her*,” Michele shot a teasing stare to Themis.

“Michele,” Klavier tapped on her shoulder. “Don’t agitate her. Anyway, we’ll be moving out once Will returns. Till then, take it easy.”

“Okay, doc,” Themis said.

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The absence of light was something that stirred fear in him. It was most uncertain whether there would be monsters or bandits that would attack their nearly defenceless camp with Will and Aem currently dispatched to do their tasks. Klavier lit up a candle, illuminating the place that would otherwise be pitch black. He laid out the written plans on the table, giving it another revision before they set out the next day.

“Klavier,” the voice prompted him to stop what he was doing. “You should take a rest you know. It’s not healthy that you do all the work on your own.”

“Amy,” he turned around. “Thanks for the thoughts.”

“I haven’t really had the chance to say it earlier,” she sat beside him.

“Say what?”

“Thanks for defending me the other day. I would’ve been a goner if not for you.”

“You mean the fight against Luther?”

“Yeah. I’ve never seen a knight fight the same way you do. It’s so fluid that it felt as though you’re doing some dance moves instead of actually fighting.”

“Dance moves… I’m no dancer,” he pictured an awkward impression of himself waltzing with a random lady.

“Him? Dance?” Michele’s voice thundered behind them before she burst into laughter. “He’d look stupid!”

Michele was no longer in the dress that got blowed up back in Bariura empire. It was replaced with a bareback gladiator armor with a dark chocolate skirt fitted with white frills on its ends. The recent days spent in the open with makeshift equipments meant that their things were vulnerable to theft. To counter that, Michele put on that outfit which amplified the intimidation from her already scary stare to repel thieves targeting their site.

“Thanks for the compliment,” Klavier said.

“That’s not a compliment, dimwit,” she said. “I’m insulting you.”

“Is it? Never thought that you’d throw that with a poor sense of humor,” Klavier’s rebuttal provoked Amy to laugh.

“Say that again and I’ll wreck you,” she rubbed his forehead so hard that it started to burn.

“You two look very much like best friends,” Amy chuckled. “Arguing over something trivial like that.”

“Shut your trap,” Michele placed her finger over Amy’s lips. “There’s nothing going on between us.”

“Pfft! Between us,” Amy echoed.

“Shuddap!” Michele pulled her cheeks.

“Okay okay! Gotta do my work now.”

“Amy, keep your eyes peeled for Will’s return while you’re at it,” Klavier said.

“Sure,” she returned a thumbs up as she moved to her post.

Klavier returned to the planning table, looking through the countless notes written all over the hand-drawn map. They appeared like a poor piece of artwork at first glance with countless messy scribbles made throughout the days where he watched Will, Aem and Amy bickered over the routes they should use. Since Will was already scouting for the safest route, all they had to worry about was to get the supplies for their journey back to La Veda. He sat down on a wooden stump, flipping through a thick book that was nothing but music scores of hundreds of songs.

“Not sleeping yet?” Michele asked, sitting by his side.

“Um, no. I’d better prepare a small playlist so that I can do street performance once we get to Sama kingdom.”

“What are you, a performing monkey?”

“I guess so.”

“You know it was a joke.”

“Of course.”

“Whatever. There’s gotta be a better way to raise that money…”

“Do you have any ideas to throw?” Michele asked.

“Hmm… maybe if we sell our services as mercenaries, we should get a dime quickly.”

“You mean do business that clients don’t want their hands to get dirty over?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t think that’s gonna be the most time efficient work. Our aim is to get to La Veda as soon as we can, you know.”

“We can try selling the weapons I managed to save during our escape,” she pointed at a stash of a variety of weapons near her backpack.

“That wouldn’t come without a hefty price tag, would it?”

“Um, hello. These are exotic weapons. They are priced well over five gems with the exception of your sword.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Speaking of which, I noticed that your sword didn’t cut Alice. Can I take a look at it?”

“Um, sure,” he popped the sword out of its scabbard, watching Michele pull it out so close to his face that he could feel the air near his nose get cut by it.

“Strange,” she slid her finger across the cutting edge. “It wasn’t this dull when I received it.”

“Careful of the back blade…”

The warning came too late. Michele had already made a shallow cut across her arm that ripped a part of the leather into two, exposing the skin underneath.

“Oh, I see. It’s a reverse blade,” she swung it over his head, slicing a few strands of his hair. “But swing it hard enough and it’ll cut.”

“Michele, you don’t have to use me as a training dummy.”

“Anyway, legend says that this sword is nicknamed as the Keeper of Orders, maintaining peace through talks rather than violence. The pacifistic nature of Leorone created this blade, where only the enlightened can wield it.”

“What if someone wicked picks it up?”

“It’ll burn him to crisp.”

“It’s scary that you say it with such indifference…”

“You’d better take care of it. Leorone’s wrath is worse than any living creature here on Grand Gaia if you piss him off.”

“I’ll take note of that,” he sheathed the sword.

Who knew that the sword he carried contained a spirit with such potency? It was no wonder he felt that strange tingle on his fingertips when Michele first gave it to him, almost as if it was trying to communicate with him but had no other means to do so. This could not have been coincidence for him to wield it with relative ease. There had to be a way to lure the spirit out but with the rest of the group nearby, he couldn’t be too sure whether he should do it or not. He wouldn’t want to scare them with that ability to summon the past heroes now, would he?

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It was bad news. Sama kingdom wasn’t what it used to be, at least that was what Aem saw with his own eyes. Plumes of smoke filled the air within its aquatic walls, plagued with occasional sparks of lightning that escaped into the atmosphere. Thunder rolled across the sky, threatening to strike down its fury to those that came close.

As if he knew what to do all along, he begun a search near the kingdom for survivors. With hours spent on walking endlessly in the plains, he eventually found himself standing before a makeshift camp similar to the one that he erected along with Will and Klavier to give Themis a decent place to rest. In it were civilians of all ages and professions, assisted by only a handful of soldiers that appeared healthy enough to do light logistical duties. Others were not so lucky, forced to be bedridden as a result of sustaining grave injuries.

“Who goes there?” a pikeman wearing predominantly blue armor pointed his weapon at Aem.

“Woah,” he raised his hands. “I’m Knight Aem from La Veda and I come in peace. May I seek audience to the king?”

“The king is not present at the moment.”

“Then who can I talk to? Please, I need to know what’s going on so that La Veda can send in reinforcements.”

“Very well, follow me,” the pikeman turned his back on him, escorting him into the camp to the furthest side. He pulled up the olive green canvas, entering the room. “Your majesty, a La Veda representative seeks audience with you.”

“Very well. Please let him in,” a medium-low pitched voice said. Aem stepped in, bowing to the people inside. In front of him was an adventurer-like clothed person with a sword that had intricate designs made of gold stashed on his back.

“Prince Arius,” Aem gave a formal bow to him. “Pleased to meet you once more.”

“Knight Aem, what news do you bear?”

“We heard of what happened to Sama kingdom,” Aem ignored the darkness swirling in Arius’s eyes. “We understand that you intend to retake it with whatever is left of your army and thus, we would like to offer our assistance.”

“How many men can you spare?”

“Five, my lord.”

“*F-Five?!* Four against the god’s army?”

“I understand your point of view, my lord. We are relatively tight on giving assistance right now since the god’s army plagues countless nations. We would like to seek your understanding that this is all we could offer at the moment.”

“Who are these people you speak of?”

“Knight Will, Knight Amy, Red Axe Michele, Vanros Klavier and myself.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes sir.”

“I would rather save those people the pain. Seriously, what is the king of La Veda thinking?”

“My humble apologies for wasting your time,” he gave a gentle bow. “I shall take my leave and inform the king of your decision.”

“Wait!” a female voice shot across the room. Aem looked to the side, another knight clad in a dust-colored cloak emerged from the shadows.

“Lucina, didn’t I tell you to stay away when I’m meeting outsiders?” Arius asked.

“I’m so sorry, your majesty,” she clapped her hands together. “I couldn’t help myself when I heard that knight mention his name.”

“Are you referring to knight Will, ma’am?” Aem asked.

“No,” she shook her head. “Vanros Klavier.”

“What about him?” Arius asked.

“Vanros Klavier is by far the best fighter we have in our disposal,” Aem said. “He is renowned for defeating two fallen gods of the highest calibre single-handedly. I’m sure that his skill will be put to good use under leadership.”

“I’m not so sure whether to believe that,” Arius’s eyebrows crumpled towards the centre.

“Sire,” Lucina said. “He is one not to mess with. It’s said that even the gods tremble at his very presence.”

“Fine,” Arius heaved a sigh. “Knight Aem, please let the king know of my acceptance. We would like your men to report to this camp as soon as you can. Please be fast, we do not know when the enemy will attack.”

“Sir,” Aem bowed and took his leave.

Guilt sunk in his head. The whole group was already weary from their struggle in Bariura empire and he was practically throwing them into another battle they could have avoided. He broke into a sprint, running as far as his legs could carry him back to the camp the group was in. They had better be prepared for this grim news he was about to break to them.