Klavier didn’t know how to die. Three days after getting knocked out cold he was alive and kicking, bursting with energy even though the wounds on his body were not completely healed yet. Uda was a tough opponent to deal with, so it couldn’t be helped if he got hurt anyway. Examining his thoroughly scarred body still bugged Themis as to how he lived through those cruel times.

The swordfight they had suggested a long history of rivalry between them. They knew each other’s techniques inside out, locked in a stalemate so long that it was a battle of endurance. He would have to count himself lucky for finding a loophole in Uda’s defence. Thanks to the witty final attack, the Sama kingdom was returned to her people. It was not all sugar and sweet for they had to deal with the fact that their homes were nothing more than mere rubble. The work was far from over; Will mobilized the remaining people within Klavier’s group to assist in the rebuilding effort.

The knights offered their services, lifting rubble that were beyond normal civilian’s strength. Lilith and Duel-GX destroyed parts of the ruins, making way for a new site. The knights assisted, exploiting their unrivalled strength to transport the heavy stone blocks. Klavier couldn’t help out in it since he was badly injured from the last fight. But he did what he knew best - playing various piano pieces that weaved into a single medley stretching nearly twenty minutes at once. However, it didn’t come without some form of scolding from Themis. He wouldn’t just learn his lesson already, straining his body when he was supposed to rest.

“Seriously,” Themis said. “When will you learn your lesson?”

“It’s not like it was intentional,” he scratched his head.

“Arius told me how good a musician you are,” Selena said, giving the cold stare at them. “My ears don’t lie now, do they?”

“It’s up to you to judge whether I’m good or not,” Klavier laid back slightly. “I’m doing it to help relax some agitated workers.”

“I see,” Selena turned her back on them. “Continue playing that music. They’ll love to hear more of it.”

“Grr, she should have just told you to take a break,” Themis stuck her tongue out at Selena.

“That marathon of songs is tiring okay?” he yawned. “So I guess I’ll stop for now.”

It wasn’t long before he fell asleep, head flat on the keyboard. His mouth was wide open, drool flowing out like a fountain of water. Themis pulled him up, using her personal handkerchief to wipe the saliva spilled over to the keys before dragging him away.

“Don’t go sleeping without telling me first, dimwit,” she knocked his head gently.

A month had passed. The wounds on everyone were finally fully healed, though it took much longer than anticipated. Themis blamed it on the lack of comfort for her patients since they couldn’t afford decent beds for them to rest on so they had to make the ground their friend. That meant getting muddy all over if they weren’t careful. But with the tough time over and their supplies restocked, they set their sights on a small black tower peeked through the horizon. Klavier put on the blue robe, stashing the black and white swords on the right of his waist as the group completed their final checks.

“We’re ready to go,” Will said.

“Have all your equipment been maintained?” Klavier asked.

“Inspected and are in top condition,” Aem said.

“Okay, time to make a move.”

“Going so soon?” Arius asked, wrapped in a thick blue robe as he sipped in his coffee.

“Yes, sir,” Klavier replied. “We thank you for your hospitality and hope that Sama kingdom will return to greatness.”

“We will meet again,” Arius exchanged a firm handshake with Klavier. “Vanros Klavier.”

Arius led the way, escorting them from the security behind the castle walls to the fields just outside the kingdom. It wasn’t long before the separation started to get a little painful, but they had no more reasons to stay. With another exchange of handshakes with Klavier and his group, Arius saw them off as they journeyed on back to their home.

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It had been too long since he last stepped on home soil, and now it was almost time to step on it once more. A warm sensation ran down his spine just imagining it from the longing faces the rest of the crew were making as Duel-GX made its way to Lizeria. They braved through the varying terrains of heat, cold and thunder before finally reaching the capital of Lizeria, La Veda.

The city was just like it was when Themis left: merchants busily trading their goods in hopes of a great return, bakeries churning out the latest batch of bread and children playing random games at the open spaces. The time had come; they were finally home.

“Well,” Amy said. “Doesn’t it look good that La Veda’s still at peace?”

“Of course,” Michele said. “There’s no place like home.”

“Talking about home, I still need to return to Palmyna,” she looked down at the floor.

“Do you need us to escort you back?” Klavier asked.

“I can handle it. Besides, it’s not that far from here.”

“Alright,” Klavier gave a yellow emblem. “Keep it with you. It’ll keep you safe.”

“What is this?”

“A lucky charm,” he scratched his head. “It’s said that when in mortal danger, a bird of thunder will swoop down to assist you.”

“What is the bird’s name?”

“Zazabis.”

“I see. In any case,” she pulled up her helmet that blocked her eyes. “It’s been a great honour working with you, Dragon Lord Vanros Klavier.”

“Geez, you didn’t need to say that,” the stares from the public poked on his face.

Amy rode on a horse, whipping it hard that provoked it into a furious gallop, kicking up a good deal of dust in its wake as she rode out of the capital.

“Well, there goes one of us,” Michele said. “I guess I’d better make my way back home too. Err, Klavier, make sure to take care of that robe.”

“Sure.”

“There she goes too,” Themis said as Michele walked away with her chest puffed up.

“Don’t you have a home to return to?” Klavier asked.

“It’s only a laboratory. I sold my apartment thinking that I’ll never set foot in this town again.”

“Aren’t you an unfortunate one…?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing. Maybe Will and Aem forgot about you when they rushed off to the barracks.”

“I’m not allowed to go there even if I want to,” her eyebrows formed a ‘V’ shape.

“Then you might as well come with me. Duel-GX, follow Michele will you?”

“MASTER’S ORDER CONFIRMED. TARGET: MICHELE,” it recited as it walked off.

“Lilith, you’re coming with me too,” Klavier said.

“As you wish,” she said.

Even though they were home, the stares by the public made her feel otherwise. It was expected anyway since she was away for so many years that she lost count of it. But one thing didn’t seem to change from the time when they entered Arius’s territory: Klavier seemed to repel all the hostile people just walking near them. It was like he had an invisible force keeping danger away from him, or could it be some form of magic?

In the outskirts of town was a small village situated closer to the mountains. The place was notorious for seemingly random weather patterns that rendered any form of prediction unreliable. But the good thing was that the weather was either rain or shine. At the foot of a house was a middle aged lady clad in a white robe that was browned with age. Themis’s stomach churned as they approached the stranger, maybe because she was invading Klavier’s private space.

“Err, Klavier, is it really okay for me to tag along?” Themis asked.

“Of course. Having butterflies in your stomach?”

“Sort of.”

“Don’t worry, they’re pretty accommodating, I guess.”

“What do you mean ‘I guess’?!”

“It’s been nearly ten years since I last saw them so I don’t know whether they’re the same as they were.”

“I don’t know about this…”

“It’ll be fine. Just improvise if something goes wrong, alright?”

“Fine.”

Themis couldn’t bear to barge in just like that. Her sub consciousness led her to stop several steps away from Klavier’s house. The woman teared up the moment their eyes met, running towards him so fast that she appeared to want to tackle him only to throw her arms around him. She could only imagine how it would feel like to be held by strong arms like his. If only Will could show that level of affection too…

“Target in delusional state,” Lilith’s voice rang at her ear.

“W-What the hell are you doing?!”

“Target too loud. Klavier heard you,” a smirk surfaced on her poker face for a split second.

“It’s because of you, dimwit!”

It was like she was living through the events of a horror novel; Klavier and his wife approached them so fast that she had virtually no time to react.

“Ana, meet my friend, Themis,” he said.

The signs of ageing was clear on her face. While she still had the youthful figure any girl would dream of, her face was suffered from loss of youth. Even so, Themis couldn’t help but to stare at the radiance of her smile along with a well-maintained orange-brown hair that was tied to a ponytail.

“Nice to meet you,” Ana said. “I heard a lot about you.”

“How nice of him,” she raised an eyebrow at Klavier. “You still look quite young, you know that?”

“To hear it from a young one like you,” Ana couldn’t contain her happiness, laughing like she never laughed before. “I’m really touched.”

“Ana, what about our son? Is he around?” Klavier asked.

“Um, about that…”

The sudden tension killed all the happiness and cheer in the air. Klavier looked on with a blank look as Ana whispered the news at his ear. Themis could hear her own subconscious scream the desire to know about Klavier’s son. Who knows, maybe he could become the next head knight just like Will.

“Themis, do you want to meet him?” Klavier asked.

“Sure, why not?” she stiffened up at the thought of meeting another young man.

“Expect to be disappointed,” Lilith commented.

“You’d better shut that robot mouth of yours or I’ll stuff water in it,” Themis said.

“Try me.”

“Is that a challenge?”

“Hey,” Klavier stepped in. “We’re not here to fight okay? Ana, lead the way.”

Ana turned around, leading them to a single storey house that was by no means the richest or cleanest sort. They had pretty much all the basic amenities any household ought to have, along with a small fireplace to keep them warm in the cold nights. On the side of the carpets was an upright piano, messed up with random music scores that were scattered by the wind.

“Maroma,” Ana walked through a room covered with a ragged cloth blind. “Your father’s back.”

“I’m busy now, mom. I’ll see him later,” a young boy’s voice escaped from the room.

“That boy, he’s always in the forge trying to create the best sword.”

“If that’s the case,” Klavier took the two swords off his waist. “I think I can ask him to help inspect these two swords. Excuse me,” he went in.

Themis couldn’t stand the suspense. She had to see the boy already. Her feet led her into a dark room where the forge’s fire was the only source of light. It was insanely stuffy even though there was sufficient ventilation with the windows wide open. In front of the anvil was a person who looked very like Klavier, except that he had the hair colour of his mother’s.

“Mom, didn’t I tell you not to let anyone in? Why is dad here, and what is that midget doing over there?” Maroma protested.

“Call me ‘midget’ again and I’ll make sure you don’t see the sun rise tomorrow,” a vein popped out of Themis’s temples.

“Please don’t agitate her,” Klavier said with an uncomfortable laugh. “Anyway, it’s been a while, Maroma.”

“Don’t call me that,” he swung the sword he was forging, cutting a few strands of Klavier’s hair.

“Hey you,” Themis stepped in. “That’s not how you treat your dad.”

“What do you know?”

“I’m sorry,” Ana said. “He doesn’t look like he’s ready to accept your return just yet.”

“Don’t fret,” the tips of Klavier’s lips lifted. “I should be sorry for barging in like that. So if you’ll excuse me…”

The smile won’t fool Themis. He was disappointed, thoroughly disappointed that his son would do a despicable act. He walked out of the room, leaving a ripping pain in her heart as the hard-hearted Maroma looked on remorselessly. Maroma won’t get away with this.

“Who the hell do you think you are?!” Themis pulled Maroma by the collar.

“Themis!” Ana cried. “Please! Stop!”

“Keep out of this, ma’am. This boy needs to know something important.”

“I will cut you down if you insist on your aggression,” Maroma said.

“Look boy, I don’t know what the deal with your old man is. But get this clear: he has done everything he can to provide for you all the blessings that you enjoy right now. So at the very least, respect him for who he is.”

She let go of him, nudging him to the bucket of water right behind him. His foot sunk right into the bucket, breaking the balance that he fought so hard to maintain, dunking his head into another pail of water that spilled all over his body. That ought to serve him right for being a jerk to his dad. She turned to look at her adversary, who was now soaking wet. He curled into a ball, his arms wrapped around his chest as he looked at Themis with scorn.

“That didn’t hurt, did it?” guilt bit Themis on the neck. “Why is he curling up as though he needs to hide something? If it’s a tattoo, you can show it to me.”

“That’s not it,” Ana said as she comforted the agitated Maroma.

“I do know that girls will do that kind of thing so it’s really odd to see a guy do that,” Themis scratched her head. “Wait. Don’t tell me…”

“I’m sorry, but yes.”

Themis’s jaws hung open. “Y-Your son…what in the crap?! Wait, I need to see this.”

She examined Maroma’s body once more, outlining the figure that resembled a typical female model’s. Maroma’s jawline appeared to be less angular than it was supposed to be but it was well masked under the influence of the short hair that made him look very similar to Klavier.

“Does he know about this?” Themis asked.

“Not yet,” Ana said.

“If he finds out about this…”

“Finds out about what?” Klavier was already at Themis’s side.

“Um, err,” Themis glanced at Ana. She would have something to cover up this mess. But no, all Ana was able to do was to reflect the shock that took Themis by storm too. It was then that she knew that there was no way to hide that secret from him. His expression was stony for a split second, probably absorbing the sudden revelation that his son was actually a girl. Themis stepped forward, anticipating a violent response to the unexpected change when he merely wrapped his arms around the soaked Maroma.

“Do you really think I’ll get angry over small things like this?” Klavier said softly. “Whether a girl or boy, you’re still my child. So don’t worry about it.”

“N-No,” she pushed him aside, rushing out of the room before anyone could react. “Don’t get near me…”

“I’m sorry, Klavier,” Themis lowered her head. “It’s my fault that she ended up that way.”

“It’s fine.