

## 151 – Dinner at Renji’s

It was around late afternoon when Armen, Potts, and I found the house with the red bricks in the Hearth district. Before I could even walk up to the large door of the building, an excited Elfin spotted me from the rooftops and slid down a drainage pipe five floors to the ground, immediately grasping my hand as she came up to me.

*“Yuuta! Come! Come!”*

She pulled me up to the door, opened it, and then dragged me across the entry hall and up a winding stairwell to the fourth floor, while Armen and Potts just floated along behind me.

After barging through the door to an apartment, Elye stopped in the middle of a large living room, where I was finally allowed to catch my breath.

Beaming with pride, the Elfin announced to the three other occupants: *“I found Andasangare Yuuta!”*

I looked at the three people who were seated on floor cushions by a large expensive-looking wooden table that sat low to the floor. Emily and Renji were there, as well as his Sorceress friend named Kally. She had long smooth black hair, small hard brown eyes, and a tight-lipped smile. Her body was also incredibly-thin, I thought. Due to her pale skin, she could easily be mistaken for a Native.

“You made it!” Renji said. He indicated a seat next to the Sorceress. “Sit! Have something to eat, we just picked it up from a local restaurant.”

I took in the spread of food that covered the table. Amongst it was all the various foods that my companions constantly talked about, with Renji even having found something akin to Soba and Mentsuyu sauce if my eyes and nose weren’t deceiving me. There were various kinds of meat, some cured, some grilled; breads of several types, with one looking like sourdough and another that was full of grains and nuts; omelettes, though not the kind I was familiar with, but more like a pie in shape and full of various bits of meat and vegetables; two large bowls of improvised salads that, if I had to guess based on their locations on the table, were made by Emily, since only her plate had salad; and drinks of different kinds, alcoholic and non, along with cold tea like the kind I’d had in Lundia, as well as some kind of fruit-infused water.

As I looked at the four available cushions on the floor, I realised that Renji had prepared for both Saoirse and Ludwig to join for dinner.

Before I could tell him they wouldn't be coming, Armen and Potts stepped through the doorway, the Crusader closing the door behind them.

“Is Saoirse not with you?” asked Emily.

“She has other business,” I said, and I saw the look in both Renji and Emily's eyes that was easily translatable into: ‘Who is she hunting down to kill?’

“Apologies for showing up without an invite,” said Potts, taking his shoes off to reveal socks full of holes.

“This is Potts,” I announced. “He's an Exorcist like me.”

“We actually already know each other,” Renji said. “Sit down everyone.”

I nodded and did as he asked, finding a seat next to Kally, who regarded Potts and I with wary glances, though most of her attention fell on Armen.

The Crusader sat down next to the seat that Elye had abandoned, ending up opposite where I sat. Potts found a spot next to him and immediately helped himself to some bread and a bowl of what I guessed might be hummus.

“Thank you for the dinner,” I said on behalf of myself, Armen, and Potts.

“Of course. I'm really glad you made it, even though Ludwig assured me that you would.”

“How'd the quest go? Sounds like you were done very quickly.”

Elye jumped onto her knees on her cushion, smacking her hands on the table, which drew a twitch from one of Kally's eyes. No doubt she found her insufferable, if her beige-and-blue aura was anything to go by. *“Emily is SO strong now! She was like swoosh! Then the bird fell to the ground with a damaged wing. Renji and I killed it. It was delicious!”*

I blinked. She'd summed up their fight in an instant.

As though realising that I wanted maybe a bit more information than that, Kally spoke up. Her voice quite warm and slightly-deep which stood a bit at odds with her personality I thought. “Emily is very talented. I showed her a few ways she might utilise her Affinity, and she was able to quickly impair the Scalebird's ability to fly with but a single attack.”

“I didn't feel any Backlash either!” she quickly added, unable to keep herself from bragging.

“That's great,” I said. “Did the new wand help?”

“It feels so natural to use,” she replied.

“I was surprised to learn that she was given a Quicksilver Brush *and* a Caged Spell-Tome by Savant Ludwig, but, with her talent, they will not be wasted.”

Although her tone was complimenting and warm, her aura was showing an emotion I hadn't seen in a while: jealousy. Of course, if Emily was a natural genius, and Kally was the type that'd worked her way up through determination and hard effort, then there would obviously be some envy there.

“Have you tried using the Spell-Tome yet?” I asked.

Emily shook her head. “I want to grow stronger before I do. Ludwig and Kally both said it would be for the best if I didn't try to use it before I had mastered my Affinity.”

I wondered if their caution was due to the possibility of a potent Backlash if she tried to use a spell she wasn't ready for, such as what seemed to be contained within the Caged Spell-Tome.

“Did Ludwig tell you that I have been given permission for my Advancement?” Renji then asked.

“He did,” I replied, while pouring myself a glass of the cold tea and grabbing a slice of flatbread. It was topped with grilled cheese like halloumi and some kind of sour sauce poured on top, along with red berries. I took a bite and when the taste hit me, I couldn't stop myself from scarfing down the entire slice and grabbing another.

“It would be amusing if you became a Spellfist,” Kally said.

“It's what I'm hoping for,” he replied.

“You'd finally get access to magic like you've always wanted,” I said, to which he nodded eagerly. It was obvious that he'd worked hard to get to this point, and it made me happy to see him revelling in the reward he was about to receive. For his sake, I hoped he would get something that utilised magic.

**“It has been a long time since I witnessed an Ascension,”** Armen added. **“I should like to see it again.”**

Renji gaped as he took in Armen's face. The Crusader had taken off his helmet to try some of the bread on offer and Saoirse's glamour still seemed to be in effect, as his skin was that of a human and not a True Undead. His hair was unchanged however and had the look of spun gold.

“Armen... you're—” Renji started to say, just as the ceramic mug in Potts' hand exploded, showering him with the steaming-hot alcoholic beverage he'd been in the middle of drinking.

Before any of the scalding liquid could hurt him, Kally had raised a hand and 'frozen' it mid-air, along with the cup shards the large droplets surrounded.

“Thank you for the quick thinking, Kally,” Renji said.

“I'll get a bucket!” Emily exclaimed and ran to fetch it from a room down a hallway connected to the living room.

“Are you unharmed?” asked the Sorceress.

“Thank you, yes,” replied Potts. “I don’t suppose you have any disposable plates and cups for me to use. Something you won’t be saddened to see break.”

Renji laughed. “I honestly thought people were joking about your misfortune.”

“Unfortunately not,” the Exorcist replied.

“**This bread is delicious,**” said Armen, unfazed by the chaos around him.

After the dinner, I went to the room that had been made available for Armen and I. Potts had already headed home, though not before somehow breaking the hinge to the bathroom door by simply touching the handle.

Renji had said he could come along for his Advancement, but heavily implied that Potts would pay for his own transport, which I thought was fair and which the Exorcist had no obvious qualms about.

After disrobing and using a washbowl in my room to wipe myself down, I got into bed, leaving Armen and Jules to sit by a table where they both quickly got into playing some kind of boardgame akin to chess.

As I drifted off to sleep, I realised I hadn’t introduced my friends to my newest talking familiar, so if they came into my room while I slept, there’d be some explaining for me to do...