

Hero of Darkness

#Chapter 1: A Man at the Edge –

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Winds howled along with the passing cold breeze. At the time of midnight, in the glitter of lights from skyscrapers & malls along with multiple vibrant neon signs; the city life kept running as usual.

Amongst these sky-touching buildings & millions of people going about their lives, stood a man at the edge of the highest roof in one of such office buildings. He heaved a sigh, looked towards the bright moon & closed his eyes. Thinking & contemplating how & why his life came to be this way. Thinking to himself, Elric asked.

"Man, why am I the only one living so miserably? Will anything for once, go the right way for me? Why am I the only one always getting short end of the stick? It's as if the world itself is trying to tell me that I really don't matter at all."

Reminiscing about his childhood, Elric remembered the young him when he was 12 years old. He was a good kid with a great talent for reading among other kids in his class. The teachers would always praise him for being quick to answers. He was always good at getting the pronunciation of words correct & could read a chapter from the book without running out of breath easily. But this made his fellow students dislike him at the same time.

Some started bullying him as the days went on & even when Elric asked for help from his Teachers, no one helped him. Some saying it's just a small quarrel between children while some intentionally trying to smother the incidents to avoid being accused of neglecting the students of their class by school management.

So, Elric never got the help he deserved. When he told his father about how the kids at his school were bullying him, and even beating him on some occasions; instead of consoling his youngest son, his father reprimanded him to not bring such small matters into the house. His father worked in a manufacturing company for household appliances and had to spend many hours per day in the office as he was the manager of the department. So naturally, he was always tired & tensed up when he returned home.

After holding his sobs somehow, Elric told his mother, Sophia about the incidents. She told him that she would talk to his teachers. Elric believed her & decided to wait for tomorrow. But the next day, nothing happened. He still got beat up again, his parents had no time to listen to him. Even his older brother, David whom Elric looked up to told

him to 'Man the hell up'. David was 17 years old & part of his school's baseball team. And due to his growth spurt kicking in, he often tended to be physical with his body & rash with his mind.

He paid no attention to his younger brother as if it didn't concern him. Elric couldn't ask his elder sister Jessica as she would get mad at him even if he mistakenly entered her room. She was very peculiar with her things, clothes & looks. And always spent a lot of time in front of the mirror for God knows what reasons..

Author : Let's call her someone with 'Princess Syndrome'.

So after both his family & school staff failed to help him, Elric had no choice but to endure the harassment at school. Hoping that his bullies would get bored & not target him any longer. He even stopped being active with his studies & interacting with other students & teachers alike to not stand out. And later when he went to high school, he adapted the same approach.

But during these times, Elric did find something to keep himself busy with. He no longer held love for historical figures or whatever they taught in schools rather in comics that he often read at the Comic store a couple of streets away from his house.

Somehow, these Heroes from comics gave him a huge sense of belonging & an urge to be a better person. His favorites were Spider-Man & Batman. He would often imagine if getting bit by a radioactive spider will give him powers like Peter Parker or whether he could find a mysterious clan of ninjas & martial artists who could teach him how to fight like Batman.

But as all things come to end.. So did his interests in Comics. As Elric hit puberty, he became engrossed with the culture of Anime which was reaching a new horizon of popularity throughout the world. He would spend most time of his day watching them than studying for his class test tomorrow.

Years later, he entered the world of Novels and Mangas. And like there are no exceptions.. He got entangled in the web of addictive Cultivation stories, Korean hunter Manhwas, RPG & Virtual Reality game stories and the ones where a good for nothing Otaku gets hit by Truck-kun and gets reincarnated or transmigrated into another world.

But without realizing that he had spent these years distancing himself from his family & friends; he had become a loner who barely functioned in society. Spending so much time alone made him mentally become someone who liked being in solitude.

Due to his innate talent for learning & remembering what he read instantly, his grade never fell below what was expected from him. Elric had realized to this point that he had the rare case of having what we call Eidetic or Photographic memory.

He had the potential to become much more in terms of academic skills but he simply had no interest in them at this point. His parents didn't care much for him anyway.. Only providing food & shelter out of obligation. He disliked both his elder brother & sister who always had the halo of entitlement around them. He didn't have anyone he could call a friend at this point.

As compared to his brother & sister, Elric was someone without great ambitions and only good enough to live a mediocre life.

In the upcoming years, Elric finally landed a job as an Accountant in a big name company & got a good income salary job. He finally left his house and started living alone. Even when he had any conversations with his family over the phone, it'd be him who initiated the call most of the time.

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4 YEARS LATER.

Elric was 30 years old today. He stood in a line inside a coffee shop, to get his morning dose of Cocaine.. Erm, I mean Caffeine.

Today was his Birthday, yet not a single person had wished him Happy Birthday. No one from his family called, he had no friends even in the workplace he was heading off to. There wasn't anyone who he interacted much with if not out of necessity; and barely anyone he could even express his thoughts to. Not even a friend online or a group of fellow Nerds or Otakus. He had outgrown all of them.

His current state of life was completely stagnant & uneventful in the last couple of years.

This hit Elric really hard.. For the first time in his life, Elric had found himself completely alone.. both in body & spirit. This was something he yearned for during his teenage days. But now it suddenly felt terrifying and as if he really had nobody in his life.

He didn't have a pet because they needed a lot of care & Elric was indeed a man-child when it came to the responsibility of taking care of someone else.

At the same time in the coffee shop, his turn came & he reached his hand out to grab the coffee cup.

But he suddenly felt a warm touch in his palm.

"Erm, excuse me. The coffee is in my other hand". A girl with bright blue eyes, blonde hair and a very slim built body looked at Elric and signaled him to remove his hand.

"Ah, my bad. I was lost in thoughts." Elric said.

"Hurry up now. Other people are standing in the line". Elric came back to reality for real at this moment & quickly got to the side. He soon left for the office. He did notice the name on the girl's uniform before leaving... 'Katherine'.

After returning from the office & having dinner (which wasn't just a cup of noodles like standard Japanese Mangas. Our boy knows how to cook.), Elric recalled the event of touching Katherine's hand.

For some reason, he just couldn't help but think about that moment again & again, over & over. Elric being the Virgin guy who never had a girlfriend, female friends or any form of physical connection to women throughout his life, got looped into that moment given how big of a Simp he had become over this point for fictional women. The Ideal romantic partner for people like him only existed in Novelty.

After overthinking it for a long time, he finally fell asleep & woke up the next morning to follow the same cycle of corporate slave life. His routine followed for the next couple of weeks, in the meantime he'd casually greet Katherine with good morning & hellos.

He had made himself familiar with her. And Katherine would greet back & sometimes even give him a soft smile; which always brightened up his day. Little did he realize that Katherine was doing it because it was part of her job to be nice to customers. But being the idiot he was, he felt like it only him getting the special treatment.

A few days later, Elric stood in the same queue for his morning coffee. But this time, something was different in him. He wanted to make a move on a girl for the first time in his life. Elric thought to himself "What's the worse can happen? She completely turns me down? Or at most, I end up embarrassing myself in front of few people here. Aiyo, why is this so hard?"

Elric was a total noob in this department. He had already prepared for the worst. After Katherine got free from her shift, which ended only after 10 minutes since Elric got his coffee. He came towards Katherine and asked her..

"Hey, Katherine. Do you have a moment ?"

"Yes.. What is it?"

"Oh, nothing. I just wanted to ask if you were free tonight."

Katherine looked at Elric with surprised eyes.

"And I assume you had some plans which depended on me being free tonight ?"

Elric was startled [Have I been seen through ?]

He gathered his courage and said "Yes. I wanted to ask you out for dinner." Elric said with all his might. He sounded very calm & confident as if this was a normal day-to-day thing for him, but inside he was like [Fuck, Fuck, Fuck! I'm so screwed!]

But surprisingly in the next moment, Katherine responded.

"8 PM, pick me up at central city park. I live nearby. Give me your phone number, I'll send you the address later."

Gobsmacked! Flabbergasted! These words could completely describe Elric's facial expressions perfectly. He didn't believe what he was hearing at all. He expected an instant refusal but surprisingly he wasn't ?..

"Umm.. You're not joking, right? I didn't think you'd say yes."

Katherine looked at him cheekily and spoke, "I was actually waiting for you to ask me out. If you had taken even longer, I would've done it myself."

Was this a dream? Nobody is playing a prank, right?

"Wait a minute.. You were?" Elric asked.

"Of course. Out of all these people, many who are regular customers here, only you look at me with puppy eyes whenever we meet each other in the morning. Don't think I didn't notice the smile you always have after you greet me. We girls have our own intuition too you know. It was obvious that you like me. So I thought why not give you a chance ?" Katherine said while throwing a smirk at him.

Outmatched! Elric was completely Outmatched!

Why was the girl saying guy's lines & seemed to be in control of the situation? It was supposed to be his role. For the first time in his life, Elric questioned himself if he was truly a man..

"Okay." That's all he could come up with in response. And as soon as Katherine put her number in his phone, Elric quickly ran off from the scene like The Flash.

Author : Run Barry, run.

Elric did not believe what happened a few minutes ago was real. He pinched himself a few times and even slapped his face twice to make sure he wasn't dreaming. He finally mentally prepared himself for the first date in his life.

He knew that he couldn't afford to go halfway tonight. Because the first impression is the last impression when it comes to dates.

Surprisingly, the date went well. Elric didn't hold back. He booked a reservation in a nice restaurant, took Katherine to a Zoo before dinner, had fun with her while sharing their life stories so far.

To his surprise, Katherine came from a poor family. She got the job in a Coffee shop to support her expenses & was also taking some acting classes. Currently, she lived in a shared apartment with a few of her college friends. Katherine was 3 years younger than Elric who lived alone & supported himself. So this earned his respect for Katherine. As to some men, self-dependent and hard-working women are much for reliable & have a strong character than Daddy's Little Princesses on social media these days.

After this date, things kept progressing between Elric and Katherine over the next few weeks. But one day, Katherine suddenly disappeared. She didn't pick up Elric's calls and even her Roommates didn't know where she went. Elric, who was infatuated with Katherine at this point felt like something was missing inside of him.

For the first time in the past 2 decades.. He felt loss & helplessness.

"Do I really care about her that much? Why do I feel so empty suddenly ?" Elric thought. But he couldn't put his finger on what was irking him so much.

Obviously.. He had fallen in love.