

VILE EVIL HIDES UNDER THE VEIL

Chapter 3: Derriere

'This is exactly the kind of dream I need before I die. I couldn't do it by then, but in this dream, nobody can stop me.'

Eren thought and launched himself towards aunt Nina.

He hugged aunt Nina so tightly right after seeing her, she was taken aback metaphorically as well as literally. Eren's growth spurt hadn't started by this age so he was a lot shorter than her, with his 5.5ft height, making him look like 14 years old despite being older. His head tucked right under Nina's bosom.

Eren felt like he was standing right in the middle of a garden full of roses that were in full bloom after taking Aunt Nina in his embrace. She exuded an enchanting bodily fragrance that was exclusive to her, according to Eren.

Eren was in a self-imposed hurry. He allowed his hands to roam around aunt Nina's back for some time before he moved towards the softest zone he could lay his hands on with his position.

Nina thought Eren had a bad dream and was finding some sort of support in the embrace and started caressing his hair. But his abrupt hand movements soon afterwards were something she wasn't expecting. And when they headed towards her derriere, she thought she had to break the siege. Nina pulled herself apart from the forced embrace, pulled Eren's cheeks hard till they turned soft red and admonished him:

"This is not the way you can come down here little lad, even if you had a bad dream. I run a business here. What if somebody saw you walking here all unkempt? Go get freshen up first. Then come by the breakfast table. I've made pancakes. Your favourite. I'm sure you won't be able to have them often once you enter the academy. So I'll compensate you with these small treats every once in a while during this month."

But Eren was in a zone of his own. He tried taking Nina in her arms again. Thinking: 'Even in my dream, she is playing hard to get. I can only imagine her reaction had I acted the way I acted back then.'

But Nina wasn't to be underestimated. She was a C Rank healer after all. Her body stats were far more prominent than a normal woman of her age. She held Eren's head in her palm, stepped back from her position, and watched him struggle to get close to her.

Nina didn't understand what had happened to him today. He was always a shy kid, speaking to her only when it was necessary. And that too with short replies and non-verbal nods.

But today's Eren felt like he was a man on a mission. And he didn't even stop to reply. Nina thought Eren had a psyche-shaking nightmare, probably related to his parents and that had made him unstable.

Nina had almost decided she should allow him his sought-after hug after thinking like that. But Eren's next words made her change her mind in 180-degrees:

"What's wrong with you? I don't have much time and yet you are still trying to maintain decorum. And for what? Don't shy away from your maker. In this world, you belong to me. I control you. With my thoughts, I can make you disappear. And with my thought, I can make you look ugly. Do you want to look hideous?"

'This isn't a nightmare, this is one of 'those' dreams. He is a growing boy after all.' Nina thought and puffed her cheeks. With a sullen pout, she pulled Eren's cheeks some more to make him snap out of his apparent daze:

And it worked. Eren soon got sober and started thinking rationally again after the cheek pain woke him for good. He looked at his aunt Nina and his surroundings again while caressing his now-swollen and beet-red cheeks:

'The level of detail is too real for this to be a mere dream.'

Eren started walking around the place while mumbling to himself.

'The atmospheric pressure, the surface texture, the light reflection rate, the physics, and shadow details!'

He observed everything that was in his sight keenly. He even changed his positions, made his hands touch a few objects, and jumped on his position for some time, as if to confirm something.

'They can't be considered as mere renditions in dreams. And it's still too much for an illusory spell. The caster needs to be a highly ranked mage specializing in illusory spells. Nobody at that level would care enough about me to cast such spell and trap me in it, especially when I was dying at the time.'

'Then... that means.....!'

Eren looked at aunt Nina with his mouth wide open, as if trying to find an answer through her he suspected the most at the time:

"This... this is all real?"

"Hehehe. Looks like you still haven't fully awoken from your sleep. Yes silly, this is not a dream. And what kind of dream you were envisioning that needs me to be ugly?"

Eren smiled mirthlessly at Nina's reply and answered her question with the question of his own:

"Aunt Nina, what day is it? And why didn't you tell me my mother didn't go looking for my father but in fact has settled down in a different city with her new family?"

Eren asked the first question to know exactly what day it was. And he asked the second question to finalize his hunch for good. Eren didn't find out about his mother's new family before his teen years were over. He had visited aunt Nina at that time, and she had finally told him.

By asking her the second question, he wanted to gauge Nina's reaction. The high-ranked illusory spells can indeed mimic the past to a certain extent, but they are still based on the particular set of memories that belonged to the person on whom the spell was going to be cast on. If the caster had only read about the memories Eren had when he was a teen, he couldn't read and connect the memories from when he was past his teen years to these memories. Otherwise, a flaw would surface in the spell and it could get broken.

But nothing like that had happened.

Nina acted like the real Nina if she had been given such news at that time. She felt shocked, puzzled, and then angry at someone.

“How do you know about your mother? Who told you?”

“I was told by some stranger I don’t know. He had left before I could ask him about anything else. But your response tells me it’s not a lie. don’t worry aunt Nina, I was just confused and emotionally not at the right place when I woke up thinking about the same thing that man had told me over and over.

But I’m alright now. don’t worry. I’m not thinking about confronting my mother. First, I heard from that man that she had settled down in a very distant city from here. And second, what would I even ask her after finding myself in front of her? That why did she leave me? Why did she need to start a new family?

I already know the answer to those questions. I’ve figured them out. She left me because my face reminded her about my father. He has been missing. Not dead, and not run away from her. Just missing!

She must have loved him dearly. And his inconclusive status was something unbearable for her. It didn’t let her have her much-needed closure. That’s why she ran away. From me. And from memories of my father.

My mother must have left to look for my father. Maybe she found something about him, or maybe she realized that searching for him anymore would be futile. Either way, she had to give up on her husband. And to give up on him, she needed to give up on me as well. Hence she didn’t return from her unfruitful search. As for why she started a new family? Why shouldn’t she? She is still in the prime of her life. A new family means a new start. That new family must have given her something that I never could. The ability to forget my father.

How can I blame her after understanding all this? I was the unlucky party in this equation. Let’s just say luck wasn’t on my side. There are far worse fates men have gone through in this world. Compared to that, this is still nothing. It’s better for all of us that we just accept the fact as it is and move on.

I also have you who takes care of me so much, I feel more pampered and protected than kids who stay with their parents. Should I even call myself unlucky after finding a blessing in you? I don’t think so.

More importantly, why don’t you try and answer my first question? What day is it?”

Eren had already closed his distance and embraced his aunt Nina again while saying all this. His actions were natural and his tone was calm. Almost like someone speaking from experience. But he also had shown his vulnerability with his hug.

Eren's act did have some flaws. For example, he seemed extremely rational and devoid of emotions for a boy of his age when he said this. Especially considering the things that he was supposed to be going through because of his parents' situation. But having those flaws made his act perfect. Sometimes, perfection is found in imperfection. Wabi-sabi!

Nina considered that flaw to be Eren's defence mechanism to keep himself away from getting hurt, by blocking all the emotions.

'That's why he was so rattled up after waking up today. He must be thinking about all these things last night. He must have felt like the fate he was cursed with wasn't in his control. That dream must mean him trying to subconsciously gain that control back. By imagining himself to be the 'maker' of his world, and control his subjects.

But, amazingly, he came to such a sound conclusion on his own. I still consider him too young, but his thought process is showing signs of maturity.'

Nina started ruffling Eren again in her embrace while being engrossed in those thoughts. Therefore she didn't realize that Eren's hands had landed on their intended targets ever-so-covertly this time!