

ABNORMALITY IN TYPE-MOON: MADNESS OF ANIMEVERSE

Chapter 11: Chapter 11: A Real Dream



When she opened her eyes, a sea of flames greeted her.

The fire stretched across the entire mountain, its blaze leaping into the sky, dyeing the already dark, murky heavens a brilliant orange-red, like a stunning yet terrifying display of fiery clouds.

Okita Souji blinked in confusion, scanning her surroundings.

"What... is this?"

All around her, the high flames danced wildly.

She remembered. She had just been summoned, defeating a rather troublesome modern mage, and returned to her Master's home alongside him.

She had many questions, but seeing the fatigue on her Master's face, she decided to let him rest.

Then what?

She too began to meditate, closing her eyes to restore her energy... but when she opened them, she found herself here, in the midst of a blazing inferno.

Okita raised her foot, intending to take a closer look at the surroundings.

Crack.

A sharp sound reached her ears. She glanced down.

Beneath her foot lay a charred corpse.

She couldn't tell how long it had been roasting in the flames, but the body had been completely blackened, with no unscathed flesh remaining—its face entirely unrecognizable.

As she looked around, she noticed more of them—scattered here and there on the scorched earth.

Dozens of corpses, all carbonized by the fire, their appearance lost. Some were clearly male, some female, others the hunched forms of the elderly, and even young children of seven or eight. A rough count suggested over thirty bodies.

None showed any signs of life.

Judging from the condition of the remains, they had all been burned alive. Their final moments must have been ones of unimaginable agony.

Suddenly, the sound of footsteps echoed from ahead.

"...Traitor!"

A staggering figure emerged before Okita.

The person wore tattered armor, their entire body wrapped in bandages, obscuring their face. Only their voice betrayed their advanced age.

Hatred burned in the figure's eyes as they glared at Okita Souji, as though wishing to tear her limb from limb.

"You traitor! Our entire clan devoted everything to you—our knowledge, power, loyalty, and even our magic crests! We gave it all! And this—"

The person pointed a trembling finger at the charred bodies around them, rage in their voice. "—this is how you repay us?!"

Okita Souji's body shook, a low, crazed chuckle bubbling from her lips.

No, not her. The person she was experiencing this through—their laughter was filled with madness.

"Hahahahahaha!"

The wicked cackle escaped from her mouth, evil and maniacal, like a demon from the depths of hell.

"Yes, exactly. This is the result of raising me for five years. Are you satisfied, old fool? It's a pity I can't see your face twisted in fury—it would've made this all the more delightful!"

The person, whose body she now inhabited, tilted their head back, their wicked laughter chilling.

Okita could feel it—this person took twisted joy in the massacre they had committed, reveling in the deaths of dozens.

It was ecstasy derived from destruction.

A genuine devil.

...

Okita Souji opened her eyes again.

This time, she found herself back in the present—a spacious traditional Japanese residence, a nameplate bearing the word "Aozaki" hung at the gate.

This was her Master's home.

After they had left Mount Enzou the previous night, the two had hurried back to the Aozaki residence. Her Master went to rest, while she had leapt onto the rooftop, standing guard while also closing her eyes to meditate.

Somehow, she'd ended up dozing off.

Okita glanced toward the sky. Though it was still overcast, faint rays of sunlight peeked through. It must have been sunrise by now.

"How odd. Servants aren't supposed to sleep," she mused aloud, rising silently from the eaves without disturbing anyone.

"Could it be an aftereffect of being forcefully summoned through the Grail by Master? And that dream earlier... was it truly just a dream, or could it have been someone's reality?"

She couldn't quite make sense of it.

If it had only been a dream, then why did it feel so vividly real?

"Saber, what are you standing there for?"

A voice interrupted her thoughts.

Okita snapped out of her reverie and looked down toward the courtyard, where Roy was stepping out of the house.

Despite the chill of the winter morning, the boy was casually dressed in a simple T-shirt and coat, his white hair tousled in the morning breeze.

He gazed up at her, crimson eyes cold as a winter's frost.

"I'm keeping watch to prevent any surprise attacks!" she declared eagerly, jumping down from the rooftop with boundless energy, the little tuft of hair atop her head bouncing playfully.

"Saber."

"Yes?"

"Until the Holy Grail War officially begins, you're not allowed to materialize."

"...Huh?"

Okita Souji's mind went blank for a moment, but she quickly recovered.

"Is it because you don't want anyone to know that you were the one who infiltrated the underground cavern last night?"

That made sense.

By now, Bazett had likely regained consciousness and reported last night's events. Though Roy had managed to stay hidden, Okita had fought Bazett directly, revealing her identity. If she were seen now, it would undoubtedly expose Roy as the culprit behind the infiltration, bringing him unnecessary trouble.

"That's part of it."

Roy's expression remained impassive.

"The main reason is that I have other plans. This shouldn't be too difficult for you."

"I understand."

Okita nodded, only half-comprehending.

Though she didn't know what other plans her Master had, being unable to materialize wasn't a big deal. It was a shame she couldn't enjoy wandering around in this era, but it wasn't something to be troubled over.

The fifth Holy Grail War, according to the information from the Grail, was only days away.

As long as she avoided exposing herself before that, everything would be fine.

"Let's start now, then," Roy said, turning to head back inside.

Okita Souji nodded obediently.

Just as she was about to dematerialize, a thought crossed her mind—that dream.

The dream where the mountain was engulfed in flames, consuming the lives of countless people.

Masters and their Servants were connected not only through magic and contracts, but also by fate itself. According to the knowledge granted by the Holy Grail, it was possible for a Master to experience their Servant's past in dreams, gaining glimpses into their memories.

Servants, being long dead, didn't require sleep. They had no reason to dream.

Their current bodies were magical constructs—made of spiritual particles, and would vanish without the continuous supply of magical energy.

That dream... could it have been something her Master saw instead?

Could it have been his dream?

"Master..."

She called out instinctively.

"What is it?"

Roy turned to look at her.

"...It's nothing," she replied after a moment's hesitation, shaking her head and then vanishing into spirit form.

Roy raised an eyebrow at her silence but didn't press the matter. He continued on his way toward the kitchen.

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Chapter 12: Chapter 12: Rin Tohsaka and Ai Hayasaka



[📢] Shoutout to BR for joining patreon. Thank you very much. ☐]

Morning.

Kashiwagi Utaha opened her eyes.

Instead of the familiar sight of her own home, she was greeted by an unfamiliar ceiling.

"What a pity."

She sighed in mild disappointment and resigned herself to getting dressed.

As she stepped out of the bedroom and entered the living room, the aroma of food wafted in from the neighboring kitchen.

"You're awake just in time—breakfast is almost ready. Go wash up and eat," Roy called out from the kitchen as he poked his head out, smiling warmly at her.

He was dressed simply, just like the day before. His tall frame was complemented by the black-rimmed glasses perched on his nose, and as always, his lips held a gentle, calm smile. His demeanor was approachable, almost soothing.

Utaha nodded and made her way to the washroom, feeling a bit embarrassed. She was supposed to be the Servant, yet here she was, waking up later than her Master and even letting him make breakfast.

"Master, is that girl your girlfriend?"

Saber's voice echoed in Roy's mind.

"No, why would you ask that?"

"Well, it just feels like Master treats her differently. When you talk to me, you're so cold, but when you speak to her, you're all soft and warm... Oh, not that I'm envious or anything!"

Saber's voice was filled with a subtle resentment, the kind that lingered when one wasn't entirely honest with themselves.

Roy could almost picture Saber pouting, her mouth twisting in dissatisfaction.

"Saber."

"Yes?"

"When I summoned you, I didn't use a relic."

"Huh? Why mention that now? Wait... Does that mean...?"

"Yes, I summoned you purely based on compatibility."

"You're quite the bold one, Master."

Saber, hearing this, gasped internally, clearly surprised.

The number of Heroic Spirits in the Throne of Heroes was vast—countless, really. To ensure a favorable outcome in the Holy Grail War, one would typically aim to summon a powerful Heroic Spirit. That's where relics came into play—items tied to a Heroic Spirit, such as their weapons or garments, which served to anchor their summon. Without a relic, the Grail would simply summon the Spirit whose nature best aligned with the summoner.

This method, however, came with considerable risk. One could end up summoning an extremely weak Servant, as history had far fewer great heroes than it did ordinary or even insignificant figures.

For most, such a summoning would elicit just one reaction:

"You don't actually want to win, do you?"

Summoning based on compatibility alone offered no guarantees of strength—there was no way it could compare to the assured might of a Heroic Spirit summoned through a relic.

If one truly sought victory in the Holy Grail War, they would prioritize seeking out a relic to summon a powerful hero. This was the consensus among all participants of the war.

"I care less about a Servant's strength and more about compatibility—the relationship between Master and Servant. Do you understand?"

"Oh!"

"So, my only request is that you fight for me with all your heart."

"I understand now, Master!"

Saber's voice grew bright, full of excitement and joy.

"To be honest, I've always wanted to serve under a Master like you! I, Okita Souji, swear upon the honor of the Shinsengumi to fight alongside you with all my heart. If I break this vow... well, then may I be cut down by my comrades in the Shinsengumi!"

Summoning based on compatibility...

This didn't just mean that the Master would gain a Servant who aligned with their spirit. It also meant that the Servant would gain a Master who suited them just as well. There would inevitably be common ground between them—similar goals, experiences, or shared ideals. This made forging a strong bond between Master and Servant far easier than with a Heroic Spirit summoned through a relic.

If they couldn't get along under such circumstances, the problem had to lie with the Master.

With that, Saber fell silent, seemingly content with Roy's explanation.

Seeing that she had finally quieted down, Roy smiled faintly.

Indeed, he valued his compatibility with Saber more than her strength. That much had been no lie.

Utaha finished washing up and took a seat in the kitchen. As expected, breakfast consisted of a traditional Chinese-style congee with side dishes. In

Japan, congee was typically reserved for when one was sick, but as she had let her Master cook, she had no right to complain.

"And it's delicious," she thought, secretly impressed. The congee was remarkably flavorful for something so simple. She hadn't expected it to be this good, but after last night's dinner, she understood.

Roy's cooking was exceptional. At least when it came to authentic Chinese cuisine, he was a master. It was even better than the Chinese food she'd had at restaurants. This wasn't a skill honed over just a few months—clearly, it had taken years of dedication and practice.

"Is Roy-sama the only one living in this house?"

"There's also a pair of sisters, but they're usually out and about. No telling when they'll be back."

"Aren't there a lot of dangerous beasts in the wild?"

"If anything, the beasts should be afraid of them."

Utaha blinked, then slowly nodded as realization dawned on her.

So, the real powerhouses of the Aozaki family were those sisters who were always out in the field?

That made sense. Yesterday at the refugee shelter, the dark-skinned youth had seemed more concerned with Roy's family than with Roy himself. So Roy, despite being the youngest, held a special status—thanks to his powerful sisters.

Knock knock.

Just as they finished breakfast, the door rang out with a rhythmic knock.

The visitor had a certain elegance to them—the tapping was soft and polite, not at all bothersome.

Seeing this, Utaha stood up to clear the dishes, while Roy walked to the entrance and opened the door.

"Good morning, Mr. Roy."

Standing at the entrance was a beautiful young woman with sleek black hair, styled into twin tails tied with ribbons. She looked no older than sixteen or seventeen, her vivid red coat accentuating her noble bearing. With her elegant posture and dignified smile, she was clearly someone of high status.

Upon seeing Roy open the door, the girl greeted him with a perfect smile.

"Good morning, Miss Tohsaka."

Roy returned the greeting as if he had expected her, smiling warmly. The familiarity in his tone hinted that they knew each other well.

"And who might this be?"

Roy glanced at the girl standing behind Tohsaka.

Behind her stood a young woman dressed as a maid, her presence no less striking than Tohsaka's. Her golden hair, tied in a single ponytail, shimmered like gold, making her even more eye-catching. Despite her beauty, she stood deferentially, dimming her radiance to serve her mistress.

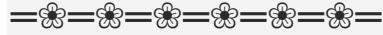
She was also clad in a traditional maid outfit.

"I believe this is the first time you've met her, Mr. Roy. She's the maid I've chosen to serve me," Tohsaka said, her eyes gesturing towards the blonde woman behind her.

"Good morning, Lord Roy."

At Tohsaka's prompting, the blonde maid stepped forward, bowing deeply in perfect form. Her movements were flawless, and not a single fault could be found.

"My name is Ai Hayasaka. I am currently serving Lady Rin."



Chapter 13: Chapter 13: Fuyuki City's Mayor, Rin Tohsaka



"Utaha, pour some tea."

"Sure, where are the tea leaves?"

"Just water will do."

Roy waved dismissively.

Kasumigaoka Utaha raised her eyebrows subtly and headed toward the kitchen.

Serving plain water to a guest? What a unique host.

Even Hayasaka Ai, the maid standing behind Rin Tohsaka, twitched slightly upon hearing this, but she remained dutifully still, her head lowered like a well-trained automaton, showing no reaction. Rin, on the other hand, didn't seem to mind at all. She accepted the water Utaha poured for her, and even casually blew on the hot liquid as if she were used to it.

"Is she your servant?"

Rin's gaze shifted to Utaha, who had taken a stance similar to Hayasaka's behind Roy, trying to mimic the formal demeanor.

"Yes, her name is Kasumigaoka Utaha."

"My, my. It's quite rare for you to take on a servant, and such a lovely girl at that. Living alone under the same roof?"

Rin smiled slyly, her expression hinting at her mischievous thoughts.

Utaha frowned slightly at the remark.

"The house is a bit large, so it needs more hands to manage, that's all."

Roy took a sip of his tea, his tone neutral.

"Oh? You've lived here for three years, and only now you're thinking of getting help around the house?"

Rin narrowed her eyes, scrutinizing Roy as if trying to read his true intentions.

"Well, things are about to get busy."

Roy casually waved his right hand, and for just a brief moment, Rin caught a glimpse of the Command Seal, shaped like wings poised to take flight.

"A Command Seal!"

Rin's playful expression immediately disappeared, her demeanor turning serious.

"When did it appear?"

"Last night."

"You're planning to participate in the Holy Grail War? If you didn't have the desire, the Greater Grail wouldn't have given you a Command Seal."

"That's right."

Roy nodded ever so slightly.

The Greater Grail chooses its Masters based on two criteria: magical potential and the will to participate. Given how many mages now reside in Fuyuki City, the fact that the Grail had selected Roy indicated that he indeed had the desire to compete.

"If you want to join the Holy Grail War, you must have a wish you want fulfilled, right? But the current Grail is broken. It can't grant any wishes."

"I'm aware."

"Good. Then I won't say more."

Rin relented, realizing that Roy had lived here for three years; he knew all the relevant details. His personality was such that, once he decided on something, no one could change his mind with mere words. Knowing him well, Rin chose not to press further.

As for terms like "Holy Grail War," "Greater Grail," and "wishes," both Utaha and Hayasaka Ai remained bewildered, clearly out of their depth.

"Just to be sure, your wish isn't something... malicious, is it?"

Roy chuckled. "Like, say, wishing to destroy the world?"

"Don't joke about that."

Rin rolled her eyes at him, clearly unimpressed.

"This world already has enough problems. If anything, we should be finding ways to improve it."

"Does it seem like I'm joking...?"

Roy's eyes narrowed slightly, a soft smile still on his lips as he murmured to himself under his breath.

"What was that?"

Rin looked at him, confused, having missed his quiet remark.

"Nothing," Roy waved it off, taking another sip of tea to warm himself.

"So, Miss Mayor of Fuyuki City, why are you here so early? You must be quite busy, no?"

Kasumigaoka Utaha's eyes widened in shock, turning to the twin-tailed girl seated across from her. Mayor? This girl, who looked about the same age as her, was the mayor of Fuyuki City?

This barely sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girl was in charge of one of the last four major city bases in Japan, overseeing the lives of tens of thousands of people?

"Of course, I'm here on official business."

Rin's shoulders slumped slightly, her weariness showing.

"Last night, something major happened at the underground cavern beneath Mount Enzō. Someone managed to infiltrate it unnoticed, summoned a Servant, injured the infamous gatekeeper, and escaped."

"Really?"

Roy's expression shifted to one of surprise.

"Yes. The entire branch of the Mage's Association is in an uproar."

Rin lifted her cup, taking a small sip of the tea, the warmth pushing back the chill of the early winter morning.

"That does sound like quite the serious event."

Roy clicked his tongue, seemingly intrigued.

"So, why did you come here first thing in the morning? Shouldn't you be busy handling that?"

"Isn't it obvious? Those old geezers kept pressuring me non-stop!"

Rin sighed, clearly exasperated.

"I told them we should wait for the investigation results, but the elders at the branch were all furious. They insisted I come to you to inquire about... her

whereabouts. Honestly, they treat the Greater Grail like it's their personal property."

"The Mage's Association, huh? Even the branch is filled with the same snakes and rats."

Roy nodded in agreement.

"But they're going to be disappointed. Aoko hasn't returned yet. And even if she does, there's no way she'd listen to those old men. If anything, they'd be lucky if she doesn't burn their beards off."

"Let them dream."

Rin didn't seem too concerned. She had expected this outcome even before she came. The only reason she bothered coming at all was to go through the motions.

"Being mayor must be quite the hassle."

"I'm already doing my best just to keep my seat."

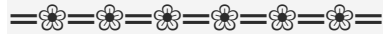
Rin fell silent for a moment, her face showing a hint of frustration.

The only reason Rin was the mayor of Fuyuki City was because the city had long been the territory of the Tohsaka family. After her father's death, she became the rightful successor. Despite the turn of the century, the power shifts in Fuyuki had reverted to a feudal-like system, a reality Rin often resented. But with the city's leylines under her family's control, she was the only one capable of using their power to safeguard the city. As a result, the other mages respected her, and her position as mayor was relatively secure.

Her real issue lay with the Mage's Association branch in Fuyuki.

The presence of the Greater Grail beneath Fuyuki had been a well-kept secret until the global catastrophe a decade ago. Afterward, the Grail's existence became known to all, and the Association dispatched families to station in

Fuyuki, calling it their "Japan Branch." Among them were ancient mage lineages with millennia of history, making the Tohsaka family's prestige seem insignificant by comparison.



Chapter 14: Chapter 14: Lending Hayasaka Ai



The magi families, backed by their powerful lineages, have long treated Fuyuki City as their personal playground. Not only do they often oppose Tohsaka Rin in her management of the city, but they even claim—without hesitation—that the Holy Grail should be reclaimed, becoming the private property of the Mage's Association, free from any outsider's grasp.

The Mage's Association's actions didn't go unnoticed. Magi families from across the globe have sent envoys to Fuyuki, turning the city into a tangled web of conflicting interests.

Among the four major base cities in Japan, Fuyuki is notorious for being a swamp of power struggles.

Tohsaka Rin had lost count of how many times she had headaches dealing with it all.

"Anyway, since you don't have any leads here, and the Mage won't be returning, I'll just report that to the others."

Tohsaka Rin finished her cup of hot water and stood up, ready to leave.

"Do as you like," Roy shrugged indifferently. He had never been fond of the Mage's Association.

"Oh, right, do you think the one who broke into the underground cavern could be Zouken Matou?"

Just as Rin was about to leave, Roy seemed to recall something, his tone turning serious as he addressed her.

"Zouken Matou...?"

Rin froze in place, frowning in thought.

"He is, after all, one of the three founding families of the Holy Grail War, and he's deeply rooted in Fuyuki. If it were him, sneaking into the cavern unnoticed wouldn't be impossible."

"But that old monster was wiped out along with the Matou family three years ago..."

Rin held her breath for a moment.

"And it was you and that Mage who did it."

"That's right. I told Aoko, and she personally took care of the Matou family, wiping them off the map."

Roy's tone remained calm as his fingers drummed lightly against the table.

Rin nodded, reminiscing. Three years ago, the Matou family home had been obliterated.

Zouken Matou had been blown to pieces by magic artillery, and swarms of parasitic worms had poured from the wreckage, blotting out the sky.

Rin had a younger sister, who their father had sent to the Matou family under the guise of "ensuring a better future." Only after seeing the worms that day did Rin realize just how far the Matou family had fallen into the pits of hell—and the magnitude of the mistake she and her father had made. For eight long years, her sister Sakura had been trapped in a sea of worms, tortured,

mutilated, violated—all in the name of what that decrepit monster had called "training."

On that day, standing amidst the ruins of the Matou estate, it was Roy who had carried Sakura out of the worm-filled chamber beneath the mansion.

And it was Roy who had set the estate—and the swarm of worms—ablaze, burning it all to the ground.

Since then, the Matou family had been completely erased from the world of magi.

No one had dared to avenge them, especially given that a Mage had been involved in their destruction.

Besides, the Matou family had few allies to begin with. After the family was wiped out, their remaining assets were seized by opportunists, and Matou's only known descendants, Zouken's distant relatives Shinji and Tsuruno Matou, were rumored to have been assassinated soon after. Not a single drop of Matou blood remained, nor did a single coin of their fortune.

That had all taken place three years ago.

Since then, it seemed as though Zouken Matou truly had died that day, never reemerging from the shadows.

Yet both Roy and Rin knew full well how hard it was to truly eliminate that ancient monster.

Was he really dead? They could never be sure.

"In that case, it's safe to assume the intruder was Zouken Matou. I'll relay that information to the higher-ups in the Association."

Rin let out a snort, an uncharacteristic malicious grin tugging at her lips.

"If he's dead, all the better. If not, well, let those old geezers deal with it. Let them tear each other apart!"

"Now that's a brilliant idea," Roy nodded appreciatively at her plan.

Standing by, Kasumigaoka Utaha and Hayasaka Ai remained silent, clearly out of their depth.

"Oh, by the way, about my sister..."

"She's in Misaki City. You already know that."

"Do you think she'll return for this Holy Grail War?"

"That, I don't know."

"I see."

Rin let out a heavy sigh, her expression clouded with a mix of regret and sorrow.

"Thank you. If it weren't for you, I'd still be in the dark about everything, and Sakura... I can't imagine how much longer she'd have suffered. Our family owes you a great debt, one that I'll make sure to repay someday."

"You don't need to thank me. I did it because I wanted to."

Roy gave her a casual smile, dismissing her gratitude as unnecessary.

Then, his gaze shifted toward Hayasaka Ai, and his expression suddenly sharpened.

"Oh, if you really want to repay me, how about lending me your servant for a few days?"

Hayasaka Ai looked up, her eyes widening in shock.

What? Why was she suddenly dragged into this?

Kasumigaoka Utaha was equally baffled.

"Hayasaka? Lend her to you? For what?"

Rin stared at Roy, her confusion apparent.

Do you really need another servant? Or... could it be that puberty has finally hit you, and now one beautiful girl isn't enough?

"My servant, Utaha, here—this is probably her first time in such a role. She's not used to the work, and frankly, she's a bit unskilled. She still doesn't quite know what she's doing."

Roy gestured toward Kasumigaoka behind him with a slight nod.

"Your servant, on the other hand—Miss Hayasaka Ai—seems quite professional. I'd appreciate it if she could help train Utaha for a few days. Don't worry, once she's gotten the hang of things, I'll send Hayasaka back."

Kasumigaoka Utaha silently lowered her head, pretending to count the lines on the floor.

"Well, Hayasaka, what do you think?"

Rin pondered for a moment before looking toward Hayasaka Ai.

She didn't seem to mind, but it ultimately came down to Hayasaka's own choice.

Is refusing even an option? I really don't want to do extra work...

Internally cringing, Hayasaka Ai forced a flawless smile onto her face.

"No problem. It would be my honor to assist Lord Roy in any way I can!"

Damn this maid instinct of mine!

"Good, as long as you're willing."

Rin nodded, but then seemed to remember something.

"Hayasaka, come with me. I need to talk to you about something."

"Yes, ma'am."

Rin led Hayasaka Ai out of the living room and into an empty room nearby.

"Hayasaka, Roy is generally easy to get along with—especially when he's wearing his glasses. He's quite laid-back and tolerant. If you slack off a bit, he probably won't mind. But if he takes off those glasses, do your best not to engage with him."

The more Hayasaka listened to Rin's warnings, the more alarmed she became.

This Roy guy... Is he some kind of dangerous dual personality? He sounds terrifying!

Can I take back what I just said and go back home?

"There's just one thing you absolutely must remember while you're there."

Rin's expression turned deadly serious.

"Don't ever bring up what happened three years ago."

"For Roy, that's a taboo topic. If anyone mentions it, stop them immediately. If you can't stop it, then get as far away from him as possible, as fast as you can. Do you understand?"

"...Yes."


Hayasaka Ai nodded, her mouth slightly agape.

'Lady Kaguya, I miss you so much!'

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Chapter 15: Chapter 15: The Truth from Ten Years Ago





"Lord Roy, shall we begin the training?"

After Rin Tohsaka left, Ai Hayasaka sighed in resignation. She gave her face a light pat, adjusted her expression into that of a dutiful maid ready to serve without hesitation, and entered the living room.

She wanted to train Utaha Kasumigaoka as quickly as possible so she could return to Rin's side. Yet, upon stepping into the living room, she found that both Roy and Utaha were already dressed and prepared to go out.

"No need to rush with the training. Let's head to the shopping district first," Roy said, trading his loungewear for a long coat.

"Utaha just arrived yesterday, so the house is missing quite a few essentials. We need to do some shopping. And you, too, Ai—you'll be staying here for a while, so you'll need to pick up some things as well."

Utaha had also changed into a fresh business outfit, though inwardly, she couldn't help but grumble.

How many identical sets of office clothes does this Aozaki household own, anyway?

"...I understand," Ai replied with a nod.

Before long, the three of them were ready to go, locking up the house before heading toward the shopping district.

Fuyuki City—or rather, New Fuyuki City—wasn't very large.

The original city had nearly burned to the ground in the great calamity ten years ago, and New Fuyuki was built atop the ruins. Now, as one of the last four surviving base cities in Japan, New Fuyuki had a population of about 200,000. There weren't many high-rise buildings anymore, and even its

busiest commercial district was barely comparable to a small, rural town. But at least the shops carried most of what they needed.

"Lord Roy, may I ask a few questions?" Utaha cautiously glanced at Roy as they walked toward the shopping district.

"Of course. I'll answer what I can," Roy responded without looking back, his tone relaxed and easygoing.

Ai discreetly sized him up from behind—he was wearing glasses, which meant he should be in a reasonable mood.

Having only arrived in this world a few days ago herself, Ai was equally in the dark and perked up her ears to listen.

"You mentioned Misaki City earlier when talking to Mayor Tohsaka. Is it one of the four base cities now?"

"Yes. Fuyuki City, Misaki City, and then there's Tokyo City and Kanbusu City. Those are the four base cities left in Japan."

Both girls furrowed their brows in confusion, falling into thought.

Tokyo City was familiar to them—it was likely the former Tokyo Metropolis. But Fuyuki, Misaki, and Kanbusu were completely foreign names. These must be unique to this world. They wondered if any of the people they knew had also crossed into this bizarre place.

While it was hard to say for the others, perhaps there would be some clues in Tokyo City.

Utaha silently prayed. Her family had lived in Tokyo; she could only hope they hadn't ended up in this strange world.

"I have another question, though it may be a bit bold... What exactly is the Holy Grail War?"

Ai silently nodded in agreement.

She had been serving Rin Tohsaka for over ten days now, and out of caution, she never dared to ask any deep questions. Yet Utaha, who had only arrived a day ago, had the audacity to bring up such a sensitive topic.

Still, Ai couldn't deny that she, too, was extremely curious about the Holy Grail War and the wish-granting Grail. So, she decided to listen closely.

"The Holy Grail War is a type of magical ritual."

"You're probably familiar with the idea of the Holy Grail, right? In Christian legend, it's the cup that Jesus used to serve wine. Many believe it holds miraculous powers, and numerous tales have sprung up around it. Of course, in Europe, there are over two hundred supposed 'real' Grails, with each church claiming theirs is the genuine one. Even if Jesus himself returned, I doubt he could tell which is the real one."

Roy's voice was casual, but then he continued, "The Holy Grail in the Holy Grail War, however, truly possesses extraordinary power—akin to the legendary Grail. If someone obtains it, they could make any wish come true, even immortality."

"To gain that chance, seven Masters are chosen, each summoning a Heroic Spirit to fight. They battle until only one pair remains. This brutal contest is what's called the Holy Grail War."

Utaha and Ai were both left breathless.

A Grail that could grant any wish, even immortality? Seven Masters summoning Heroic Spirits to slaughter each other for it?

The concept was so fantastical that it felt impossible to process.

"Of course," Roy continued, "that's the version spread by the creators of the ritual—the Three Founding Families: Einzbern, Tohsaka, and Matou. The truth

is a bit different. While the Grail does possess immense power, it's not omnipotent. The notion that it can grant any wish is a lie propagated by the Founding Families."

"Moreover, the Grail hasn't functioned as a wish-granting device for a long time. The last Holy Grail War, held here in Fuyuki City ten years ago, was the direct cause of the great calamity."

"The cause... of the calamity?"

Utaha's heart skipped a beat.

"Lord Roy, are you saying the event that turned the world into this—the great calamity—was caused by the Holy Grail War?"

Ai's temples throbbed.

Wait, what? The Holy Grail War did this to the world?

And the last one was held right here in Fuyuki City? Suddenly, the ground under her feet felt scorching hot, as if she were walking on fire.

"Yes, the Fourth Holy Grail War was the catalyst. That's widely accepted among magi now."

Roy nodded. "The Grail became corrupted, turning into a 'Black Grail.' Instead of granting wishes, it became a tool for destruction. Someone must have wished for the world's end, and so the Grail obliged. It nearly brought about the total destruction of the world."

That was the source of the great calamity—the one that ravaged the entire globe and ignited a year-long inferno.

Both Utaha and Ai were utterly floored.

It was one thing to have a Grail that could grant wishes, but who in their right mind would wish for the world's destruction?

How much hatred must someone have for the world to do that?

"After the calamity, the Founding Families—Einzbern, Tohsaka, and Matou—were punished by the Mage's Association. The Tohsakas and Matous were stripped of their magical patents, and the Einzberns had to give up their homunculus technology."

"That's it?" Utaha was incredulous. "For causing the end of the world, they got off with just a slap on the wrist?"

Her voice dripped with resentment toward the Founding Families. If it weren't for them, she wouldn't have been reduced to a refugee after being dragged into this world.

Even Ai couldn't help but chime in with a sharp remark.

After the comment slipped out, she quickly remembered that she was serving Rin Tohsaka, the descendant of one of the Founding Families.

I really hope Rin didn't hear that.

"Don't romanticize the Mage's Association. They don't care about humanity's survival. Their concern is only for the preservation of magic. They manage the world simply because humans are necessary to carry on magical traditions."

"...My perception of the magical world has hit rock bottom," Utaha muttered.

"Same here," Ai agreed, their faces reflecting the same helpless frustration.

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Chapter 16: Chapter 16: The Maid Outfit



[📣 Shoutout to Benjamin Galbreath & King for joining patreon. Thank you very much. □]

Shopping District, Clothing Store.

Shiina Kasha was busy picking out clothes, with Ai Hayasaka by her side offering her opinions.

Although they had just received some shocking news, it was far too distant to concern them now. Right now, buying new clothes took priority.

"Lord Roy, do you have enough money for all this?"

While Shiina Kasha went to try on clothes, Ai Hayasaka approached Roy and asked quietly.

"I still have a little saved up, just a bit though."

Roy's expression turned slightly awkward as he said this.

"After all, I've got two money-eating monsters at home. Every time they come back, they raid my savings without a second thought. And that's money I've painstakingly saved up working for the city!"

Roy's face was one of deep pain.

However, Ai Hayasaka, with her wealth, couldn't quite sympathize with his financial struggles.

"You mean... your sisters?"

Ai Hayasaka had heard about the Aozaki family from Rin Tohsaka. That pair of sisters constantly wandered abroad, leaving Roy all alone at home. What irresponsible siblings, she thought.

"Huh? I'm not part of the Aozaki family."

Roy's expression froze for a second before he smiled at Ai.

"Did I not tell you? I've just been living with them for the past three years. The savings they took, well... let's just call it rent, protection fees, and tuition. I don't really mind."

Wait, he's not part of the Aozaki family?

So, his full name isn't Aozaki Roy? He's just... Roy?

Ai Hayasaka suddenly remembered Rin Tohsaka's warning to never touch upon Roy's past.

"I need to buy some daily essentials as well."

With that, she hurried off to another store.

The two girls didn't want to keep Roy waiting long. They quickly picked out a few outfits, bought some daily necessities, and returned to where he was.

"Lord Roy, what are you looking at?"

As soon as they got back, they saw Roy staring at a mannequin in a shop window. The mannequin was dressed in a very revealing outfit. The deep blue base color was eye-catching, with an exposed chest, a nearly bare back, a flowing short skirt with lace trims, paired with a matching headband, black stockings, and leg garters.

"I'll take two of these—no, make that four!"

Roy strode up to the shop assistant, his voice booming.

Shiina Kasha & Ai Hayasaka: "(, #Д)"

"...Lord Roy, are you sure you want to buy this?"

"Just to be clear, who are these for?" Ai cautiously asked.

"Of course, for you two!"

Roy beamed as he walked over to them with a satisfied grin.

"Don't you think they'll look perfect on you?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm not that shameless!"

"If I may speak bluntly, I've never worn such a revealing maid outfit before."

"No worries, you'll get used to it!" Roy laughed heartily.

His tone left no room for debate, making it clear that this decision was final.

"Do you even have enough savings for this?" Ai Hayasaka made one last desperate attempt.

"Even if I don't, I can buy it on credit. Magicians have that kind of privilege!"

Roy's voice was firm, his resolve unshakable.

Not the place to flaunt that privilege!

Both girls thought in unison, exasperated.

After the clothes were packed up, the three of them began their journey home.

"By the way, what are homunculi like in the world of magic?" Shiina Kasha suddenly brought up an intriguing topic as they walked.

"Nothing too special," Roy replied casually. "Their bodies are designed just like humans, but mentally, they're blank slates. Their personalities are shaped by the magicians who create them. However, a rare few are born with exceptional emotions, almost like normal humans, so you can't make a blanket statement."

"And how are homunculi treated?"

"Terribly. To magicians, they're just tools, disposable commodities. They can be created and discarded at will, and no one cares about their feelings. They're treated like machines."

"Even though magicians are short on manpower, homunculi still have no rights?"

"None whatsoever. But they are reliable in combat, precisely because they're easily replaceable. That's why the Magic Association will grant some sentient homunculi a rank, but no matter how powerful they are, they'll always be stuck at the lowest rank. No exceptions."

"I see."

"Why the sudden interest?"

"Well, it's for writing reference. I'm an author, after all."

Shiina Kasha thought for a moment and gave a frank answer.

She had been abruptly transported to this world.

What if she suddenly gets sent back one day?

Roy glanced at her without saying a word and kept walking.

Ai Hayasaka also shot her a look but remained silent.

Shiina Kasha wasn't very good at hiding her thoughts—or rather, compared to these two, she was an open book. They'd already figured out what was on her mind, and because of that, they didn't feel the need to comment further.

After all, she was just a girl in her teens, not yet the elite that Ai Hayasaka was.

Shiina Kasha needed a dream to lean on, something to give her strength.

Back at the Aozaki residence.

Once they arrived home, Roy assigned Ai Hayasaka a guest room to stay in.

"Remember to change into your new outfits!"

With a look of sheer helplessness, the two girls walked into their rooms.

"What do we do? Do we really have to wear this?"

"I don't mind." Ai Hayasaka, ever the dutiful maid, changed into her new outfit with practiced efficiency.

Shiina Kasha, left with no choice, reluctantly picked up the skimpy maid outfit. After getting dressed, the two stepped out of their rooms.

Roy, who had been eagerly waiting in the living room, brightened at the sound of their footsteps. But when he saw them, his expression fell into utter disappointment.

"What... is this?"

"It's chilly, Lord Roy. I'm sure you'll understand," Shiina Kasha said with a smile as she spun around, proudly showing off her look in the maid outfit.

It was indeed the open-back maid outfit Roy had bought, but he hadn't expected her to layer it over an inner garment, covering herself completely.

What a buzzkill!

Ai Hayasaka was similarly dressed, though she remained silent, letting Shiina test the waters.

"Sigh, never mind."

Roy shook his head, clearly deflated.

"I was actually planning to check if you had any talent for magic as a little reward for modeling those outfits."

The room fell into an immediate silence.

Without a word, Ai Hayasaka turned on her heel and headed back to the bedroom.

Shiina Kasha muttered a traitor under her breath and quickly followed.

Roy smiled, satisfied.

When the two re-emerged from the room, Roy felt like his entire world had shifted.

The inner garments were gone, leaving only the maid outfits. Despite the similar designs, Shiina Kasha and Ai Hayasaka exuded completely different styles.

Shiina Kasha's fuller figure accentuated the curves of the maid outfit, with the edges hugging her body and sinking into her soft, pale skin. The low-cut design showed off her assets, the deep cleavage almost begging to draw people in. Her legs, encased in black stockings, contrasted starkly against her snowy white skin, creating a dazzling "absolute territory" between her skirt and stockings.

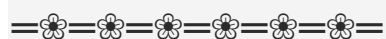
She looked flustered, her face tinged with pink, her eyes darting away shyly, giving off a distinct "I'm not wearing this for you!" tsundere vibe.

Ai Hayasaka, on the other hand, had a slender frame, giving her a delicate, almost fragile appearance. Her waist was so slim it seemed like it could be easily grasped, drawing a natural urge to touch. Perhaps to differentiate herself from Shiina, she wore pure, spotless white stockings that made you want to ruin their pristine appearance.

To further shift the mood, Ai Hayasaka had let her golden hair flow freely, her bangs pinned back with a floral clip, her blue eyes gleaming with an innocent, youthful look that hinted at a subtle cunning.

One maid with black hair and stockings, full of curves and a tsundere attitude, the other with blonde hair and white stockings, soft and scheming.

Ah, I can die happy now!





"Hold out your hands."

Shiina Kasha and Ai Hayasaka obediently extended their soft, pale hands, placing them in front of Roy.

Both of them looked at him with eager anticipation.

Roy, in turn, stared back at them with just as much expectation.

"..."

"..."

"Where's the line?"

Roy furrowed his brow, visibly displeased as he glanced at the two of them.

"The line?" Shiina Kasha's expression was one of pure confusion.

Ai Hayasaka froze for a moment, her lips twitching slightly before she forced a flawless smile.

"Master, please test our magical potential!"

Roy nodded in satisfaction.

Shiina Kasha's cheeks twitched as she drew in a deep breath.

"M-Master... please test mine as well!" The raven-haired girl spoke so fast it sounded like rapid-fire, as if she could barely withstand Roy's unwavering gaze. Her face flushed crimson, even her ears turning bright red.

Only then did Roy nod approvingly and take their hands in his.

For a brief moment, Ai Hayasaka wondered if this was all just a ploy to hold their hands.

But then a warmth flowed from where their hands connected, coursing into her arms and spreading throughout her body. Startled, she focused intently on any internal reactions.

However, after a few moments, all she felt was the warmth circulating within her. There wasn't any notable change in her body at all.

A sense of unease began to rise in her heart. Instinctively, she glanced up to gauge Roy's expression.

His brow was furrowed tightly.

That expression—so different from the joy one would expect when witnessing the birth of a magical apprentice—was almost alarming.

Shiina Kasha also began to sense something amiss, her face growing pale.

Before long, Roy withdrew his hands.

"...Well?" Shiina Kasha's voice was stiff as she asked, her unease barely concealed.

Ai Hayasaka remained silent, simply watching Roy.

"There's no sign of magical circuits," Roy said bluntly, cutting straight to the point like a knife.

"No magical circuits means... we can't use magic?" Shiina Kasha asked again, unwilling to give up.

"Exactly. Magical circuits are the foundation for all magic. Although the systems and terminology might differ in various regions, this basic requirement doesn't change. And magical circuits are innate. You can't

increase them through hard work. Since I couldn't detect any magical circuits in either of you, it means you'll never be able to use magic."

His words were like a dagger, slipping in clean and sharp.

And then twisting, leaving them gutted.

The two girls, thoroughly defeated, slunk away.

A short while later, they returned, having put their inner garments back on.

Disappointed as they were, life still had to go on.

Under Ai Hayasaka's guidance, Shiina Kasha gradually learned the duties of a servant.

The Aozaki residence was enormous, and cleaning it was no small feat. Even for two experienced workers, finishing it in a day would be difficult, let alone one teaching the other.

Ai Hayasaka wasn't actually a maid who handled physical labor. As the personal maid to a young lady of high status, her responsibilities were more delicate and refined. Yet, she handled the chores effortlessly, as if she had done them all her life.

Roy couldn't help but consider asking Rin Tohsaka if he could take Ai off her hands.

In the front yard of the estate, beyond the lawn, there was a small vegetable garden. It contained winter crops like radishes and potatoes, vegetables that could still grow in the colder months.

Ai Hayasaka stood at the edge of the lawn, her gaze fixed on the little garden with a probing look.

"What's wrong?" Shiina Kasha wiped the sweat from her forehead and walked over to her, puzzled as she noticed Ai's unwavering stare at the garden.

"The Aozaki family must be quite prestigious here in Fuyuki City. So why would they grow vegetables in their own yard?" Ai asked, her voice filled with confusion as she eyed the garden.

She hadn't seen anything like this at the Tohsaka household.

Shiina Kasha blinked, taking a moment to process the question.

For an ordinary family, it wasn't unusual to grow seasonal vegetables in their yard. But considering how vast the Aozaki estate was and how valuable land was in Fuyuki City, it did seem a bit odd. Wasn't it beneath their status?

"If there's space, why not use it?"

Roy stepped out into the corridor, catching their conversation, and replied as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"But wouldn't people of similar status laugh at them for it?" Ai asked, still unconvinced.

"They wouldn't."

Roy sat down at the front of the corridor, a faint smile tugging at his lips.

"Because everyone does it. All the magicians in Fuyuki City, and maybe even across the world, are likely doing the same thing."

Ai found herself at a loss for words.

This was far from the aristocratic image she had in her mind.

Shiina Kasha didn't seem to care much, though—her family wasn't particularly high-class to begin with.

"Ai, this world is nothing like the one you used to live in."

Roy gave Ai Hayasaka a meaningful look. "Ten years ago, a curse erupted, and a fire ravaged the entire world for over a year. Now, think about what remained after that inferno."

"...A curse."

Before Ai could respond, Roy answered his own question.

"Today, the reason humans haven't ventured out of the base cities isn't just because the wilds are overrun with monsters. It's because the land outside is covered in curses. These curses don't just pollute the mind—they corrupt the land, making it uninhabitable, unfit for farming, and incapable of sustaining life."

"The land that's suitable for farming now is only usable because magicians have purified it. Only then can it be used for crops and homes. But the problem is, there are too many curses and too few magicians. The imbalance has left food resources severely lacking, which is why magicians hold such an exalted position."

"Now, do you understand why refugees are treated so poorly?"

Ai Hayasaka and Shiina Kasha fell silent, their faces thoughtful.

If even food was scarce, it made sense that they, as refugees, had been allowed to stay.

Only now did they realize how merciful it was for Fuyuki City to take in such useless people, people who were only good for cooking.

"Sparing you refugees, bringing you into the city, and feeding you was the result of Rin Tohsaka's struggle against the Magic Association."

With that, Roy stood up and went back into the house.

To have managed such negotiations with the stubborn, profit-driven elders at the Association's branch was no small feat. The elders couldn't care less about the fate of refugees, and who knew how much Rin Tohsaka had to sacrifice to secure their acceptance.

The only reason the Tohsaka estate didn't have a vegetable garden of its own was because Rin was too busy to tend to one.

Ai Hayasaka and Shiina Kasha remained in the yard, speechless.

Any lingering resentment they had over being treated as refugees, stripped of dignity and proper status, evaporated in an instant.

Nightfall.

Ai Hayasaka and Shiina Kasha had both gone to bed.

Even Okita Souji had been ordered to rest.

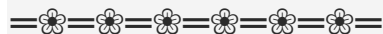
Roy lay on the large bed in the master bedroom, his eyes wide open, hands gripping the sheets tightly. Sweat poured from his body like rain.

His entire body was wracked with pain, as if flames were burning him from the inside out. He writhed on the bed, unable to move, his slender frame twisting in agony.

At first, Roy clenched his throat, trying to suppress the sound. But eventually, he couldn't hold it back anymore, and a low growl escaped his lips, echoing through the room.

Heavy thuds and the sound of flesh hitting the walls followed soon after.

It wasn't until the middle of the night that the torment finally subsided.



Chapter 18: Chapter 18: Aki Tomoya



The next morning.

Ai Hayasaka and Shiina Kasha made their way to the master bedroom, intending to tidy up Roy's bed.

Cleaning the master's bedroom was part of a maid's duties, and Ai planned to use this morning as a chance to teach Shiina Kasha the ropes.

"There's no need to clean my room."

Roy closed the door behind him, blocking the view inside as he smiled and declined their offer.

"In fact, from now on, you don't need to clean my room at all. Unless it's something urgent, don't come near it. Just focus on the rest of the house."

The two girls exchanged a glance.

They didn't quite understand Roy's reasoning, but if it meant less cleaning, it was a welcome relief.

"Lord Roy, are you hurt?"

Just as Ai Hayasaka was about to leave, her sharp eyes caught a glimpse of something red on Roy's hands.

The skin on his knuckles was cracked, covered in multiple wounds—likely the result of punching something hard. His knuckles were bruised and raw, the injuries appearing quite severe.

But there was no blood. The wounds had already begun to scab over.

Shiina Kasha also paused, staring at Roy in surprise.

How did he get hurt like that while staying at home?

"Oh, this?" Roy glanced at his fists and chuckled, as if it were nothing.

"It's fine. Just a small injury. I'll take care of it myself. You two go on with your tasks."

"I understand."

Ai Hayasaka's internal alarm bells went off, and she quickly pulled Shiina Kasha away.

After the two left, Roy's smile faded. He inscribed a healing rune on his knuckles, then added a locking rune on the bedroom door before finally turning to leave.

Before they knew it, several days had passed.

It was now the last day of January.

That morning.

"Lord Roy, any special requests for lunch today?"

Shiina Kasha stood at the entrance to the study. The study in this mansion was enormous—larger than two bedrooms combined. She knocked on the slightly ajar door.

Roy was seated at his desk, tinkering with something she didn't dare look at directly.

He had taught them that certain magical items were dangerous to view carelessly, as the consequences could be dire.

"No offal."

"We weren't planning to cook anything with offal."

"Then it's fine. I'm not picky. You can decide on the menu yourselves."

Roy waved dismissively.

Shiina Kasha nodded and left.

To be honest, she couldn't stand dishes with offal either.

But circumstances were different now. In this world, food resources were scarce, and people couldn't afford to waste anything edible. Even offal had been developed into various dishes.

Still, she was grateful that Roy didn't eat offal. It felt like a small blessing.

"Ai, I'm heading out."

"Wait a moment, we're almost out of soy sauce. Could you bring back a bottle?"

"Got it."

Carrying a shopping basket, Shiina Kasha set off.

After about half an hour of browsing the shopping district, she had bought enough food for three people to last two days. As she paid for the groceries, she couldn't help but gasp softly. Even though she'd prepared herself, the prices still shocked her.

The food here—even something as simple as vegetables—was at least five times more expensive than in her own world, with some items costing ten times as much. And this was during a time of stability. She couldn't imagine how chaotic things must have been during the initial disaster.

"Shiina-senpai?"

Suddenly, a familiar voice, filled with surprise, reached her ears.

Shiina Kasha turned her head, and a flicker of joy rose in her heart at the sight of an old acquaintance.

"Tomoya... what happened to you?"

Standing not far behind her was a boy with black-rimmed glasses.

His face was gaunt, his lips dry, his skin greasy, and his complexion deathly pale, as if he hadn't slept in days. A scabbed-over wound split across his forehead.

Aki Tomoya tried to smile at Shiina Kasha, who still looked fresh and put-together, but the smile he forced was pitifully weak.

"Senpai, you seem to be doing well..."

Shiina Kasha was startled by his appearance.

While Aki Tomoya had always been a bit sloppy, it had never been this bad. At most, he had the typical habits of a shut-in otaku. But today, he looked like someone knocking on death's door.

She found a nearby café and sat him down, ordering tea and snacks for him.

"What on earth happened to you?"

"...Just bad luck. I ended up with an unreasonable master."

Aki Tomoya's voice was hollow. He took a sip of tea, soothing his cracked lips.

Shiina Kasha vividly recalled that day. Aki Tomoya had been taken away by that dark-skinned young man. She still remembered the events clearly. That Middle Eastern man had originally set his sights on her, but Roy had intervened and taken her instead.

Now, seeing the blank, numb expression on Aki Tomoya's face made her shudder.

What had he gone through to end up like this?

If someone like Aki Tomoya, who hadn't even been targeted at first, could be reduced to this state, what would have happened to her if she'd fallen into that dark-skinned man's hands?

Would her fate have been ten times worse?

The mere thought sent a chill through her, and she instinctively hugged herself, as if the action could ward off the cold dread creeping up her spine.

"What exactly did you go through?"

"...Senpai, could you do me a favor?"

Aki Tomoya lowered his gaze, avoiding Shiina Kasha's eyes.

"I want to leave my current master, but I have no way to do it. Your master managed to take you right from under that guy's nose, so maybe he could take me too? Please, I'll do anything—work in the mines, farm, even be a servant. I'll do whatever it takes. Just don't make me stay in that hell any longer!"

The fear on his face was unmistakable.

Shiina Kasha couldn't even begin to imagine what he had been through.

"...I'll talk to him."

That was all she could offer. She couldn't make any promises, only agree to try.

After all, she was just a refugee herself.

Back home.

After setting down the groceries, Shiina Kasha found Roy in the living room, flipping through some documents.

"Lord Roy, there's something I'd like to discuss with you."

"What is it? Go ahead."

Shiina Kasha recounted her conversation with Aki Tomoya in full detail, including when she left the house, when she ran into him, and when they parted ways, sparing no detail.

She worried that she might have fallen into a trap set by another magician and wanted to avoid causing any trouble for Roy.

"This is tricky."

Roy didn't seem angry, and Shiina Kasha quietly sighed in relief.

However, hearing the word "tricky" from Roy left her surprised.

It wasn't that she was upset by what sounded like Roy's refusal. As a refugee, she had no right to be displeased. Even if Roy outright rejected her request, there was nothing she could do about it.

It was just that in the short time since she had been brought to this world, her limited understanding had led her to believe that the Aozaki family was a powerful force—connected to Mayor Rin Tohsaka, with the sisters being prominent figures in the Magic Association.

For Roy, a member of the Aozaki family, to describe the situation as "tricky" was unexpected. In her mind, there shouldn't have been many things in Fuyuki City that the Aozaki family couldn't handle.

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Chapter 19: Chapter 19: Shiina Kasha's Request



"This is troublesome? How so?"

"I suppose I haven't told you yet—I'm not part of the Aozaki family. I'm just a guest staying here. Essentially, I'm an outsider."

Roy answered Shiina Kasha's confusion directly, laying bare the reality of his situation—he was living under someone else's roof.

"Back at the refugee shelter, the reason that guy gave me face and handed you over wasn't out of respect for me. It was because of the real owner of the Aozaki family. He was simply hoping that by going through me, he could establish a connection with those sisters."

Roy wasn't the true master of this mansion. He was merely a guest placed here by the actual owner.

On the surface, the magicians of Fuyuki City treated him with great courtesy, but it was all superficial. They only showed him respect because of the mansion's true owner, hoping to use Roy as a bridge to establish a relationship with the Aozaki sisters. Otherwise, they wouldn't bother with him at all.

There were likely countless people in the Magic Association who despised him, jealous of the favor he had received from the Aozaki family.

"If I went to Atram and asked for a servant, he wouldn't refuse," Roy continued after a brief pause. "But the cost of doing that... you're aware of it, right?"

The cost, of course, would be personal favors.

Not just Roy's favors, but more importantly, those of the Aozaki family's true master.

Shiina Kasha hadn't expected things to unfold this way and was caught off guard.

The price wasn't impossibly high, but it wasn't insignificant either. Involving the master of the Aozaki family—who wasn't present and held an extraordinarily special status—just to help a refugee? And not even one of their own servants, but rather a friend of a servant?

To put it bluntly, what made them think they deserved such treatment?

"Kasha, do you know what your friend has been going through at Atram's house?"

Seeing Shiina Kasha furrowing her brows, clearly hesitant, Roy thought for a moment and then asked.

"...No, he refused to tell me anything."

Shiina Kasha snapped out of her thoughts and, recalling the earlier conversation, shook her head.

She had actually asked him several times. After all, if she was going to help, she needed to know the details.

But no matter how much she pressed, Aki Tomoya wouldn't reveal what he had experienced. Each time the topic came up, he clammed up completely, his face filled with terror as he begged her for help.

She found it strange, but seeing the overwhelming fear on his face, she couldn't bring herself to push further.

"Is his life in danger?"

"I don't know. He just looked really worn out."

"Hmm..."

Roy let out a thoughtful hum.

"Fuyuki City has certain protections in place for refugees. Magicians, as their masters, are forbidden from harming their servants without cause. But, of course, there are plenty of magicians who ignore the rules when it suits them... If he's only looking exhausted, then it seems his life isn't in immediate danger."

The person who enacted this law was none other than Rin Tohsaka, the mayor of Fuyuki City. She had done everything she could to treat the refugees with compassion.

"How about this—I'll check in on Aki Tomoya for you and see what's really going on. After that, we can decide what to do. How does that sound?"

"That would be ideal."

Shiina Kasha's eyes lit up, and she nodded eagerly.

"So, what do we do? Should we head to his house to investigate?"

"No need to go to such trouble."

Roy smiled slightly and waved his hand in front of him.

In an instant, a thin silver line appeared before him, opening up like a pocket and revealing a dark, chaotic space within.

Reaching into the void, Roy rummaged around for a moment before pulling out a small, motionless yellow bird.

Shiina Kasha stared closely and realized it wasn't a real bird but a brass model, lifelike in appearance. Its eyes were lenses, resembling tiny cameras.

Roy inscribed several runes on the bird's body and injected it with magical energy. Immediately, the brass bird began to flap its wings and flew out the window.

The moment it left the window, the brass bird vanished completely.

"What is that?" Shiina Kasha asked, watching the spot where the bird had disappeared with a hint of envy.

"It's a simple familiar I made."

Roy explained, "I inscribed invisibility runes on it, and since it's made of metal, it doesn't have any life energy. Its eyes function like cameras, making it very useful for sneaking around and tracking things."

Just as he finished speaking, Roy snapped his fingers.

In the next instant, a transparent image materialized in the air between them, hovering midair.

The image displayed an overhead map of Fuyuki City, gently swaying from side to side—it was the brass bird's point of view.

The bird flew across the sky for a short while before honing in on its target, a luxurious villa in an upscale residential area. It swooped down toward the mansion.

"Not bad, even in a place like Fuyuki City, this Middle Eastern upstart could afford such a grand residence."

Roy clicked his tongue in awe, his expression clearly envious.

"Are you really just going to dive in like that? Isn't there some kind of barrier in place?"

Shiina Kasha was on edge as she watched, her heart pounding. The Aozaki estate had a barrier, so it was only natural to assume others would too.

And it was only now that she realized, Roy was still just a low-ranking magician, while their opponent was a fully ranked one. Roy wasn't even on the same level when it came to magical prowess. Wasn't this kind of infiltration risky? Couldn't they get caught?

"Hah, it's fine."

Roy waved a hand, chuckling softly.

"Atram's family was originally a bunch of nouveau riche from the Middle East. Before the disaster, they only used magic as a hobby or a means of self-defense. It was only after the catastrophe that they began to take magic seriously, but they've only been studying for about ten years. Their magical prowess is third-rate at best. As for their barrier? I could get past it with my eyes closed."

"Isn't he a ranked magician?"

"Bought and paid for."

"..."

For a moment, Shiina Kasha was at a loss for words.

That's even possible?

Magicians were supposed to be warriors who fought against magical beasts, an essential force for eradicating curses. Magical prowess and combat ability were paramount. How could someone buy their way into a rank, knowing how dangerous the job was?

And how could such an important position within the Magic Association be up for sale?!

"The Magic Association has been like this for ages, deeply entrenched in its web of profit. Yet, they still act all high and mighty. Rin Tohsaka mentioned it before, didn't she? The Association has long been rotten to the core."

As Roy spoke, he skillfully guided the brass bird through the gaps in Atram's barrier, easily avoiding its detection.

He wasn't exaggerating.

Atram's barrier was laughably subpar, riddled with flaws. It couldn't even begin to compare to the thirteen-layer full coverage barrier at Ryuudou Temple. If

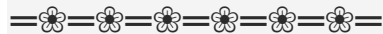
Roy were physically present, he could have genuinely slipped past it with his eyes closed.

"Got it—down in the basement, huh... oh."

Roy maneuvered the brass bird through the mansion's interior with ease. Despite the mansion's size, it didn't take long to find Atram's magical workshop, unsurprisingly located in the basement.

But the moment the bird's view entered the basement, Roy couldn't help but grimace.

Beside him, Shiina Kasha's face instantly paled.



Chapter 20: Chapter 20: The Breeding Experiment



Unexpectedly, the scene in the underground workshop wasn't as gruesome as one might have thought.

In fact, it wasn't gruesome at all.

If anything, it was rather... suggestive.

More than a dozen men and women were gathered there, completely naked, the atmosphere thick with an erotic tension. The entire screen was filled with scenes that left little to the imagination—completely unfit for description.

What the...?

A wild orgy?

Atram, you bastard, you're having way too much fun!

Roy's eyes widened as he scanned the screen back and forth.

There were only three men—Atram himself, a burly guy, and one frail figure—and the rest were women.

And that frail figure? It was none other than Aki Tomoya.

The other man, the burly one, had been brought from the refugee shelter at the same time as Aki.

No, looking closer, Atram wasn't even participating. He was just sitting there, watching with an amused smile. The only ones "engaged in activity" were the burly man and Aki Tomoya.

And even then, they were both utterly passive.

Aki Tomoya's face was deathly pale, full of resistance and fear. He tried to crawl away but was quickly pulled back.

The burly man seemed to have a bit more strength left, but even he looked haggard, as though he was close to being completely drained.

Atram watched, thoroughly entertained, his grin wide.

What the hell is going on here?

Roy stared at the screen, his mind racing.

Is Atram really this bored? Or this generous?

As Roy's eyes swept over the women, none of them seemed familiar. He recalled that the wave of refugees this month had started with an influx of people claiming to be from another world.

Since the beginning of the month, there had been three waves of refugees arriving at the Fuyuki City shelter.

Roy, as part of the city's guard, had been present for each wave.

The first wave had no familiar faces. The second seemed the same, until he saw Ai Hayasaka, whom Rin Tohsaka had secretly taken in. The third wave included Shiina Kasha and Aki Tomoya—people Roy knew. The rest were just nameless faces.

So, among the refugees, only Ai Hayasaka, Shiina Kasha, and Aki Tomoya were people Roy recognized.

Why would Atram have two of these refugees in an orgy?

Magicians never do anything without a purpose. They are always calculating, willing to go to any lengths to achieve their goals.

Magicians are also incredibly busy. Roy had to save up an entire year's worth of vacation just to get a few days off, and even then, there were still emergency missions popping up. Yet, Atram, as busy as he must be, had time to oversee two people in a debauched scene. What was the point?

Unless...

"...Lord Roy, that's enough. Please, stop the familiar."

A voice, thick with suppressed anger, cut through Roy's thoughts.

He snapped back to reality and glanced over at Shiina Kasha, whose face had turned a disturbing shade of pale.

Not suffering? Doesn't seem like he's having a terrible time to me! How dare he ask me to plead with my master for help?

That scene... It was practically searing her eyes!

"Kasha, I think this situation is more complicated than it appears," Roy said, reading the storm brewing in her expression.

"That's a—uh—refugee and a local resident. This is likely not just some party... but an experiment."

"...An experiment?"

Shiina Kasha ground her teeth together, glaring as if the word itself was something disgusting.

"Magicians don't waste their efforts on frivolous things."

Roy waved his hand, severing the magical link to the brass bird and recalling it.

"Magic, by its very nature, evolves through research and experimentation. Even something as fundamental as the concept of procreation can be studied, manipulated, and ultimately controlled to form new magic."

"Atram is probably running some kind of reproductive experiment. Specifically, it seems to involve breeding between refugees from other worlds and local inhabitants."

Three waves of refugees had already arrived.

From the very first wave, some refugees had openly claimed to be from another world.

With the growing number of refugees, such claims could no longer be hidden.

Most magicians didn't care, though. They knew parallel worlds were real, so the idea of refugees crossing over from other parallel worlds wasn't particularly shocking.

Especially since none of these refugees possessed any supernatural powers. They were all just ordinary people.

Sure, it was surprising that these people had crossed over from other worlds, but in a place like Fuyuki City, strange things like this weren't unheard of.

Ten years ago, Zelretch, the Second Magician who held dominion over parallel worlds, had appeared in Fuyuki City.

Many assumed that Zelretch had been involved in these crossings.

But magicians, as everyone knew, were beings with little regard for morals. Even with Rin Tohsaka's laws in place, it wouldn't be surprising if some of them still tried to use these refugees for their own experiments.

Atram, apparently, was one of them.

"Breeding... experiments?"

Shiina Kasha's face contorted in disgust, as though she had just swallowed something foul.

"Yes. Judging by how worn out they look, it's been going on for several days now. I'd say they were forced into it."

Roy hazarded a guess.

Perhaps there had been some excitement in the beginning, but after days of relentless activity, even the strongest man would be utterly drained. It wasn't surprising that they both looked ready to collapse. Overdoing it could quite literally be the death of them.

Roy's reasoning seemed solid.

Aki Tomoya's reluctance to share what had happened to him now made perfect sense.

If Roy himself had been caught in such a situation, he'd probably find it hard to talk about too. And if someone else found out—especially someone he knew—it would be a social death on a scale worse than anything imaginable.

Shiina Kasha's expression shifted wildly, her chest heaving with rapid breaths.

The first thing that flashed through her mind wasn't Aki Tomoya.

It was the day she had been brought to the refugee shelter.

"Didn't expect there'd be such high-quality goods among this batch of refugees. That woman, and the man over there—I'll be taking these two!"

That dark-skinned bastard had said those very words!

And his aim had been to use the refugees for breeding experiments!

If she had been taken by that man, what would her situation be now?

Would she be trapped, surrounded by men, forced to endure unspeakable things until she got pregnant? Would she be powerless to resist under the overwhelming authority and strength of a magician? Even if she fought back, would she be hypnotized, stripped of her will, unable to protect herself or her own identity?

What a nightmare!

The mere thought of such a scenario made Shiina Kasha tremble uncontrollably. She wanted to scream, to banish the horrifying images from her mind.

For the first time, she truly understood what it meant to fear magicians.

Her body shook violently as she hugged her knees to her chest, sinking to the floor. Fear coursed through every fiber of her being.

"It's alright, don't be afraid. I'm here..."

She felt the gentle hand of the boy beside her, patting her back, his voice soft and calming.

It took a while for her to regain her composure.

And for the first time, she felt an overwhelming surge of gratitude toward Roy for having taken her away from that nightmare.

