

"Where am I?" muttered Maes Hughes as he opened his eyes, looking at the room he was in. "Wait, I thought I was dead?"

"Fortunately, you are not," suddenly said a voice, which slightly startled Hughes. He turned around to look in the direction of the voice, however, all he saw was blurred.

"Your glasses are on the nightstand next to you," said the voice. As such, Hughes reached out to take them; he had to tap his hand for a few seconds before he reached.

Hughes then saw a young man with black hair and blue eyes looking at him.

"Are you the one who saved me?"

"That's correct," replied Edward. "You can get up if you want, you have made a complete recovery."

Hughes immediately realized that his body was in perfect shape. He raised his shirt to see a few scars on his body in the shape of bullet holes. If it was not for them, he would have thought that the previous event was a dream.

"Thank you for saving me, and when I have time, I would like to show my gratitude. But, I have to go."

"There is no need to rush."

"You do not understand, this is a matter of life and death."

"I am perfectly aware of your discovery of the nationwide transmutation circle and the implication behind it," replied Edward. "Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that you cannot leave."

Immediately, Maes Hughes became on guard as he looked at Edward with a solemn look. However, the latter just smiled and said:

"There is no need to guard against me; if I was your enemy, there would be no point in saving you. Now, come watch your funeral."

As Hughes watched this young man leave, he pondered for a moment before realizing that the latter was right. So, he got up from the bed, rushed after him while yelling: Wait, who are you? I don't even know your name. Plus, what do you mean by watching my funeral?"

As Huges followed the young man, he found himself in a living room with two chairs that looked remarkably comfortable. However, his eyes were attracted to what lay in front of the chair: a large projection screen that showed a funeral.

At the funeral, Hughes saw his best friend Mustang, the soldiers under his command, the Fuhrer, and more importantly, his wife and daughter.

"What is this?"

"To the outside world, you're a dead man. So, this is your funeral."

Hughes looked at the screen. Then, something that broke his heart happened. His daughter looked at his wife and said:

"Mom, why are they burying Daddy?"

"Elicia, he's gone."

"Daddy said that he has a lot of work to do; if they bury him, he cannot do his work. Stop them, mommy, stop them; daddy has a lot of work to do."

As Hughes watched his wife embrace his daughter with tears flowing down her eyes, he clenched his hand. Edward--who feared that this guy would cause trouble--immediately said: "Think of it that way, you're not really dead, just cannot see them for now."

Hughes had already figured out that this young man who saved him would not let him leave for some reason, so, with clenched teeth, he sat on the remaining chair while he stared at the screen.

Meanwhile, while Edward was watching, he was also pondering about his mortality. To him, the reason that Hughes made his family suffer like that was that he was too weak to prevent his death.

And the current him was also pitifully weak. So, one day, his family might have to bury him--just like Hughes. As such, Edward warned himself to never get complacent in his progress and to also always be careful so that he does not have to put his family through this; too many people are counting on him.

After the funeral ended, Hughes looked at Edward and asked: "Why did you save me? And why are you preventing me from warning people about my discovery?"

"Humm?" muttered Edward. "How do I explain this. Well, think of it that way. Imagine that you're reading a good book and you have a favorite character. However, the author decided to kill that character to drive the story and make it emotionally impactful, to raise the stakes.

"As a reader, there is nothing you can do about this since this is not your story. However, imagine if some God gave you the chance to travel to the world of that book and granted you the ability to change the plot as you wish. What would you do?"

"Of course, save my favorite character," replied Hughes.

"Well, that's exactly why I saved you."

"Although I'm a little flattered that I would be your favorite character, this is not a book, and I'm not some character on a page; this is real life with real consequences."

Edward looked him straight in the eyes and asked: "If you were a character in a book, how would you possibly know? How would you know if your fate was already written down from the moment you were born?"

Suddenly, an existential dread overcame Huges, but he quickly regained his thoughts.

"Okay, let's not mention your reasons for saving me, but why do you prevent me from giving the information about the nation-wide transmutation circle? Whoever is behind this, if they succeed, all the citizens of Amestris will be killed."

"Since I'm a reader of the book, of course, I already know the end of the events. As such, I also know that other people will also find this information out and prevent it from happening," replied Edward calmly.

"Even more so, since you already know the outcome, you can easily prevent it and reduce the necessary struggle and sacrifices that could happen," rebutted Huges. "Unless you do not want to intervene or you will benefit in some ways."

"See, you are finally using your talent as an intelligence officer."

Huges sighed but did not continue on this topic.

"By the way, I still do not know your name."

"Oh, sorry about that. My name is Edward Bones," said Edward as he extended his hand for a handshake.

"You're the alchemist that saved Nina Tucker?"

"That's me."

"Mustang told me about you. I'm glad that you were there to save that little girl from her miserable fate," replied Hughes as he shook Edward's hand.

"Now that everything is settled down, I will give you two options: stay here or travel with me."

Hughes fixed his glasses up as he pondered for a moment, then he responded: "I'll stay here."

Edward looked at him up and down. "Okay, you do not need to play smart. Even if you stay here, you cannot escape as I placed a powerful spell on this villa. Every day, someone will come up to give you a menu and you can choose what you want to eat. Besides that, you'll still be imprisoned inside."

"Spell?"

"You can think of it as a very advanced form of Alchemy."

Hughes sighed after hearing this, he then asked: "If I leave with you, where are we going?"

"We will be crossing the desert heading for the country of Xing."

Hughes pondered for a while before deciding to travel with Edward.