

SPELLCRAFT 1141

[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

Chapter 1141: The Hidden World [Pt 1]

~VWUUUUUSSSSHHHH!~

The torrents of energy lashing around me the moment I poured my Aether into the N Arcana sent distortions spreading all around me—no, all of us.

Blueish purple sparks began to dance everywhere, like a mixture of electricity and flames, and the surroundings slowly began to take on the form of blurs.

"I guess it's working." A smile crept on my face as I stared at all four of my remaining colleagues.

Kuzon and Ciara seemed to have overexcited features, though the former tried very hard to hide his expression. Aloe appeared as composed as ever, and Edward just seemed happy to see the Arcana work.

I was personally thrilled, awaiting what we would see beyond this world.

~WHUUUUUSSSSHHHH!~

An immense blue vortex suddenly appeared underneath everyone and warped us away from where we stood. It all happened in an instant, and before we realized it, the environment around us had changed completely.

"A-ah..." A small sound escaped my lips as I blinked, now looking around me to absorb the details of our new environment.

The luminiscent glows of energy stones, and the blank white tiles that decorated the walls, floors, and ceilings... they all felt familiar to me.

I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, then opened them to exhale.

'It feels the same.'

There was no longer any doubt in my mind as I observed the vast, yet empty room I was in.

"This is the Safehouse." I muttere, glancing in the direction of my dazed allies.

They were also looking around, most likely trying to get a proper grasp of their surroundings. None of them had ever been to the Safehouse before, so I could understand their confusion.

'The N Arcana is meant to bring us here, huh?' Did that mean we were now in the world Neron transported everyone to?'

I tried using my senses to confirm if this was the case, but as expected, I couldn't. The Safehouse was made with special properties, and had a special barrier that prevented foreign interference with it, but it in turn also prevented the extension of energy beyond its confines.

In essence, my sensory abilities were limited to this room.

"Well, I suppose we just have to get ou—"

~BZZZZTTTTZZZZ!!~

Before I could complete my sentence, a sudden sound buzzing sound caught my attention, as well as the attention of everyone else in the room.

We all looked in the direction of the sound's origin, and we found a holographic image forming from the ground up. It seemed to be projected through a Magic Item that was hanging on the ceiling.

'This is...!' My smile deepened as my eyes widened in response to the figure that was forming in the hologram.

"... Neron."

That's right! Standing before us, within the vast expanse of the plain white room, in the form of a slightly buzzing hologram, was Neron.

"Hello, everyone! Nice to see you made it this far. I knew you could do it!" The features of the hologram were identical to Neron's, except for the blue and white hues reminiscent of the light particles it was made out of.

The voice coming from the hologram matched Neron's too, and it felt like we were speaking to him in real time.

"Now, now, I know you have a lot of things to say, but this is a recording, so it can only be a one-way communication channel. So please, pay attention because I can only say this once."

I folded my arms and decided to use Magic to record all of Neron's words. Perhaps there could be some additional hints given to us that we wouldn't be able to decipher right away.

This was Neron, after all.

"Don't worry, Jared. There is no hidden message or anything. I know you'll be overthinking this stuff way more than necessary."

I felt a little embarrassed that he called me out like that, but that didn't stop me from continuing the recording. Besides, it wasn't like I was being obvious to everyone else.

"Kuzon, I know you're upset, but just hear me out, okay? I apologize for being so secretive about a lot of things, but there are reasons for being confidential with information... and that is also confidential."

I glanced to see Neron's expression, and sure enough, his brows were twitching in annoyance.

"When you arrived in the world supposedly your home, you were surprised to find it empty, right? You searched for your friends and families and found none of them. Yes, that was all me. I had to intervene at the last minute, when we were being teleported, in order to protect everyone else."

It was just as I thought. Neron transported everyone to his dimension to protect them.

"However, do not be mistaken here. I didn't transport everyone to a special dimension to protect them."

... Eh?

'I was wrong?' My face twisted in confusion.

"In more technical terms, I swapped our universe with another one. Ever heard of grafting in agriculture? Yeah, it's something like that. I pulled out our branch and put it in the place of another branch, then I put the other branch in the place of ours."

'You can do that?!' My ears twitched the moment I heard his explanation.

"The universe I swapped with ours is almost entirely identical to ours, having almost the same buildings and materials and people living within. All except one thing... it's a dead world."

Neron went on to explain how the universe we arrived at was a world where all of us had ceased to exist due to some kind of Magic Explosion gone wrong, killing everyone and everything in that world.

He used a universe that had no living entity and replaced our universe with it.

"But why couldn't you just transport everyone to a special dimension?" I asked, forgetting for a moment that I was addressing a recorded Neron.

However, to my surprise, it seemed it heard my query. Neron's hologram sighed and went on to explain further.

"This was the best method to use. I'll now explain why."

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Chapter 1142: The Hidden World [Pt 2]

"Legris Damien is a dangerous man. He is extremely unstable, unpredictable... and worst of all, he's very petty." Neron's hologram began in a stern tone.

The casual mood from earlier had now vanished, and I could tell from his low pitch and slight frown that he was being very serious now.

"His plan was to scatter as many people through the branches so we would spend forever trying to save everyone and ourselves while he went on with his plans. Unfortunately for him, I intervened and he was only able to get six of us."

Why couldn't Neron have just stopped Legris' plans entirely.

"I couldn't stop what he wanted to do because he would have just sprung something else. It's much better to allow the natural order of events to flow while I use it to my advantage. Besides, if you all didn't go on your separate and group voyages, you wouldn't be as powerful as you are currently."

With that point addressed, Neron's hologram proceeded.

"The problem with saving everyone else was that I couldn't leave them behind since they would be stuck with Legris. Like I said, he's very dangerous. With us gone, he could wipe out everything we know and love."

I understood everything he had done thus far, but it was this part that I was stuck on. Why couldn't Neron just protect everyone by keeping them in a special dimension? He could also give us the coordinates or key to said dimension when we met him in the world he was transported to.

So, why didn't he do that?

"It's much more difficult to protect than to attack. It's harder to construct than it is to destroy." Neron's hologram began.

"Within the limits of my [Timeless World], I had to protect everyone—not just within our planet, but the entire universe."

From Neron's words alone, it was clear that he was looking at things from a much broader angle. Legris Damien was petty, so if Neron had protected us and transported everyone in our planet away from harm, Legris could lash out at the other planets.

He probably didn't want the denizens of the universe to suffer for an incident in our planet.

"There has been more than enough damage caused by this conflict already. No more... at least, that was what I thought when it all took place."

I could understand his rationale now. However, was it really easier to swap universes, compared to just rescuing everyone?

"Swapping branches is easier than you think." Neron's voice echoed out almost as soon as I made the thought.

"I had Aether help me out. She governs the Tree, so you could call her its gardener. Once I sent my will across to her, and revealed all that is at stake, she was able to lend me her authority to switch universe positions."

How was that easy at all?

"I guess it's one of the perks of being a Singularity." Neron's hologram added, while shrugging his arms like it was no big deal.

'This guy...' Nearly gritting my teeth, I maintained my composure

"It's much easier than accounting for every single entity in this universe and transporting all of them to a dimension I'll have to make from scratch. You realize there are millions of ecosystems out there, right? There are organisms that have certain needs, which can only thrive under certain conditions. Do you think I had the time to carefully craft an entire universe while paying attention to all that detail?"

"You have all the time in the world, don't you?" Kuzon suddenly raised his voice, and I swear, he beat me by one second.

At this point, I could already chalk down everything Neron was saying to one thing.

"... Yeah, it was just easier to swap out the universes. In the end, I was looking for the most efficient way. Is that so wrong?"

I truly didn't know how a recording could be so fluent at reading the room, and our minds, but Neron must have understood how a lot of his ramblings didn't add up.

"A-ahem! In any case, sorry for not telling you anything earlier. In all honesty, I wanted you to find the clues yourself and also come here with your wits and abilities. And as you can see, you all made it here, no problem."

In essence, it was fine for Neron to take the easy approach when it came to protecting everyone, but when it came to us... we had to take the more difficult approach.

I could certainly see how fair that was.

Yes, I was being sarcastic.

"I do not know how much time has passed since then, but know that due to the dimension swapping, there were a lot of things to account for—like the interference of space time, and other minute factors. That means, based on my theory alone..." As Neron's hologram was speaking, I completed the words in my thoughts.

'... The time of our original world might be affected.'

I didn't know to what extent, and to what degree, but it was possible that the people that were in this world had been living without us for longer than a few months.

'It could be double that... or triple.'

What if a year had passed since our vanishing? Just how much devastation would that cause?

My body was already feeling heated up, and anxiety slowly crept in.

Right there and then, I only thought of one thing.

'I want to see everyone!'

"I shouldn't keep you waiting here. Go on and see your friends and family. You've waited long enough." Neron's voice echoed in my ears, and then the buzzing sound from earlier took over.

~ZZZzzttttzzzz...~

Once the sound died down, the hologram vanished, and silence pervaded the blank room.

No one spoke for a while, and we all stared at each other, but after a few moments of silence, I finally broke the decorum.

"Let's go outside."

The Safehouse had only one entrance and exit, and so everyone followed my lead as we ventured out to the world that awaited us.

As we got closer to the exit, a certain thought suddenly manifested in my head.

'So that explains why Aloe Vida couldn't find her panties...'

It wasn't intentional, I swear.

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Chapter 1143: The Allied Nations Meeting

[Moments Earlier...]

Within an extremely spacious meeting room, adorned with simple designs such as proper tiled floors and murals decorating the walls, there was a long, rectangular table—remiscent to a council meeting where all the stakeholders of a certain enterprise would gather.

The table was made seemingly of transparent glass, and it reflected the milky white ceiling of the room. The squeaky clean tiles were a fine mix of white and black, but thankfully the murals on the walls possessed a tapestry of colors that made the room feel alive.

Within this vast room, as one would expect, a lot of people were seated on their respective chairs, and some were also standing behind the respective seats—almost like guards to those seated.

There was only one seemed to be standing—or rather, floating—at the forefront of the bunch, and she was the moderator of this meeting.

She had pink wings, peach pink hair, and her eyes were emerald green. As a fairy, she had a naturally smaller stature compared to most of the people present in the meeting room, but the commanding presence that oozed from her made that impossible to notice.

As for her audience, they were listening to her attentively, almost religiously as she broke down the information she dispensed with pinpoint accuracy.

Everybody seated behind the very long table, and even the ones who stood behind them, were all invested in the topic at hand—some more than most.

It was a pertinent matter that they had spent ten years trying to uncover.

"That concludes the summarized version of the cumulative expedition data I have gathered." Jane Ursula spoke as she turned her gaze to everyone seated in the room.

Elf Queen Aurora Vindiel was seated and standing behind her were Lemi and Freya.

Beast King Gerard was seated and behind him were Asa and one his many wives, apparently.

Dragon King, and Leader of the United Magic Beast Council, Z'ark was seated in his miniature dragon form, and behind him were two of his loyal aids.

One was a Griffon, and the other was a Titan, though both had been considerably shrunk in size so they were incredibly smaller than their natural appearances.

Dwarf Chief Dulum, with two of his council members standing rigidly behind him with thier chubby bodies.

Albion Lestrome Indiavel, King of the Eastern Kingdom, had only his Court Mage standing behind him. As one would expect from Elrich Lendertwale, he was adorned in his usual jewels, and had a calm smile on his face.

Then, there was the seated Maro, who had Jerry and Ivan standing behind him. He felt uncomfortable seated among so many distinguished individuals, but his role as a mechanic was a very pertinent one, so he had his own chair.

The strongest Grand Mage, Serah Crimson was also seated, her arms crossed. Behind her were Maria and Ana, and together they were recognized as the strongest offensive force among the expedition team.

Finally, Beruel was also seated, and he was the only one who didn't have a single entourage behind him. He didn't seem to mind, though.

No, perhaps this was the outcome he had desired from the start.

A few Fairies stood in key positions, mostly serving as guards and assistants in case their President wanted something.

In such a place filled with nearly all the most important figures the world had to offer, a certain air of tension filled the air.

The entire room was chock-full of energy that it nearly felt suffocating. However, everyone present in the room were at least powerful enough to withstand such pressure.

As a result, they all comfortably sat and listened to their moderator further break down the results of their recent expedition and painstaking research.

"After extrapolating the information you have all gathered, and correlating all of them with one another, I've finally had a breakthrough." Jane Ursula's grin widened as she stared at the anticipating crowd.

Beams of hope could be seen spreading on everyone's faces as they all held their breaths and waited for Jane's follow-up words.

"I have been led to the Hive, the source of the Nether Beasts and all the corruption we have been battling with all this time."

So far, they had been treating the symptoms, but the Hive seemed to be the root cause of so much Nether Corruption that seemed to be spreading at an alarming rate.

Fortunately, thanks to the constant expedition the teams had been venturing on, they had managed to thin out the influence of the Nether Beasts and whittle out the corruption plaguing their world.

"Once we take care of the Hive, we'll be able to get rid of the Nether Source in the world. Once that happens... we won't need to worry about the corruptions any longer."

Jane Ursula's words was met with the silence of everyone seated in the room.

All she had said was indeed good news. Getting rid of an encroaching darkness was a step towards progress. However, there was something that couldn't be overlooked.

After getting rid of the Hive... what next?

The Corruptions, or Nether Beasts, despite being the threats that they were, served as means for these people to dish out their frustrations and also hold onto the hope that they might find the missing ones in one of their expeditions.

If the Expeditions were to end after the Hive destruction, wouldn't they devolve back to a reality where they had no purpose?

A point where they were empty.

"With my predictive data, and from the research I've been doing on the Hive, especially the concentration of Nether that I'm sensing, it might take all of our strenghts combined to completely get rid of it." Even though Jane understood what the silent she was recieving meant, she continued anyway.

"If we are able to conclude this mission and finally rid our world of the final vestiges of Corruption, we can proceed beyond our immediate zones to explore more of the universe and search for clues about our target and the source of all this tragedy..."

At this point, nearly everyone flinched. That was because there was no one who didn't know how dangerous and despicable said man was.

"... Legris Damien."

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Chapter 1144: Overpowering Pressure

Legris Damien.

The architect of the grief of the people present in this room, but also the surest bet at ever reuniting with their most loved ones.

No one knew his location, but they had to assume he was also in their universe, else the influence of Nether wouldn't be as strong. It was perhaps this very notion that made Jane and her allies so fixated on the Corruptions that were spreading from the Hive.

"You say we'll finally be able to explore more of the universe? What do you mean by that? Aren't we doing so already?" Serah Crimson raised her hand to ask, being the most forward among the group.

Everyone was curious about what Jane had up her sleeve.

Well... almost everyone.

"What we've been exploring are close planets, connected through a network that exists withi our immediate solar system or maybe even galaxy. Jane is suggesting leaving our little bubble and exploring the other millions of galaxies that exist outside our sphere of inflience. Am I correct in that assumption?"

The one who spoke was also a Fairy like Jane, so perhaps that was why he understood so much of her words and potential plans.

"That's correct, Beruel. I have been sending probes to learn more about the world beyond what we have mapped. Initially, that were too ill-equipped to handle such travels, or return due to communication issues. But after constant trials and errors, as well as some of Beruel's support, I was finally able to make functional batches that were not only capable of surviving for so long beyond our world, but also had the capacity to return."

"So that's what those things were for. I knew it." Beruel, former Fairy King, smiled as he folded his hands while resting his back on his custom-made seat.

Since he was a fairy, his chair had to be elevated to the point where he could place his hands on the table. Plus, it was smaller and more comfy—per his design.

It was no secret that a few envied how comfortable his chair looked compared to their plain seats.

"In any case, the probes are slated to return within an estimate of two weeks, and once they arrive we'll be able to learn so much from them. I have gotten some correspondence now, and the data looks promising. It's incomplete, though, so I need more."

Somehow, the darkened faces of the people slowly began to exhibit more light.

If Jane was right, then even after taking care of the Hive, they still had more ground to cover and more clues that would point them in the direction of their missing ones, or the malefactor behind the disappearance.

"About this Hive mission, we can handle it, right? Then what's the delay?" The one who asked a question this time was Gerard, The Beast King.

He had a fearless grin on his face, and his eyes seemed to ooze nothing but violence.

"Relax, big man. There are a bunch of things to consider, am I right, Jane?" Aurora, the Elf Queen added, her eyes shrewdly studying Jane's face.

"That's right." The Fairy moderator admitted. "It's mostly a precaution."

"What is it about?" Dwarf Chief Dulum asked, rubbing his beards in curiosity. After silently observing for a while, he too wanted to get a word in.

"There's a chance that my calculations might be off the mark, so the Hive might be more dangerous than estimated." Jane bagen, flexing her glasses as a short sigh leaked out of her small lips.

That wasn't the most troublesome aspect of their potential mission, however.

"There's a chance that Legris or Ciel might be behind the Hive. If that's the case, and we're unprepared, we might suffer a loss."

Jane's sudden statement caused a chill to spread through the crowd. For a moment, silence took complete charge and no one uttered a word.

No one could say anything.

"W-what does that matter? Aren't we searching for him? If he presents himself on a silver platter, all we have to do is eliminate him right there and then." Gerard roared, flexing his muscle as he tried to get rid of the tension in the air by his confident tone.

Perhaps his efforts were a little more than just boosting morale, as he glanced in the direction of Serah Crimson.

She wasn't even looking in his direction, instead her countenance showed her to be in deep contemplation.

"Don't be a fool, Gerard. Legris Damien is a shrewd one. There is a reason it's problematic for him to be present within the Hive, even if we expect it." Z'ark's aged and wise tone reverberated from his miniature dragon form.

His eyes narrowed and shone amber as he slowly closed them.

"What did you just say?" Gerard burst out in annoyance, veins showing on his face.

Once again, he glanced at Serah Crimson, but found her not even looking in his direction. The frustration he felt had to be directed somewhere, and the Dragon King had just made himself the prime target.

"You really like to run your mouth, huh?"

"I only uttered the truth."

"You overgrown lizard."

"Musclehead."

"Bitch!" Gerard rose to his feet, now caught up in his emotions as he glared at the composed Dragon King.

Something about Z'ark's smile unnerved and frustrated Gerard more.

"Why don't you—?!"

~VWUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMM!!!~

A sudden pressure filled the room before Gerard could complete his sentence, and before Z'ark could respond.

It felt so heavy and overpowering that it overwhelmed the senses and caused both warring parties to keep their mouths shut while sitting in the most bone-chilling manner ever.

Everyone else in the room could feel the pressure too, and it was devastating.

Not a single person remained unaffected.

"E-erm... S-Serah... please retract your pressure." Jane Ursula managed to creak out as she fixed her gaze on Serah's frowning countenance.

The poor Fairy could barely maintain her flight.

'Ah... my apologies." Serah's face slowly returned to normal, and she swiftly spoke in recognition of her actions.

Soon after, the pressure that had pervaded the meeting hall vanished, now replaced with a clear, conducive environment.

Even at that, no one spoke.

Perhaps they were too stunned by Serah's sudden display of overwhelming power. Or maybe... they were shocked to see her lose her cool despite the several years of constant positivity.

Serah turned to Jane, and with a gentle smile and bright eyes, she broke the silence.

"Please continue the meeting."

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Chapter 1145: Race Against... Time?

"A-ahem, as I was saying... the dangers involved with Legris being present in the Hive goes beyond our preparedness for him."

The awkward atmosphere was yet to vanish despite Serah already dissipating her energy pressure. Eyes still appeared a bit uneasy, and minds were a little rattled, but the meeting had to go on, so Jane continued her speech.

"The dangers of being exposed to such a mass of Nether is one thing. But, after expending a lot of time and effort, it would be disadvantageous for us to confront Legris afterwards."

The most advantageous situation would be for them to seek out Legris on their own terms, when they were ready and able to take him on.

Once Jane broke down the other risks involved, even the hot-headed Gerard began to see reason behind her words and also the stupidity of his own words.

"The best we can do is—"

~VWWUUUUUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMM!!!~

Once again, the room was filled with something—a distorted pressure that circulated the area.

This energy pressure was different from the earlier one.

It wasn't as heavy, but it was dense... rich and full of immense power.

It felt like space itself was bending in response to it.

"W-what is this...?" Jane stopped speaking instantly as her eyes widened in shock.

"You can sense it too? This is...?!" Beruel's eyes bulged.

He recognized the energy he was sensing all too well. It was emanating from two individuals he had fought.

"It's getting closer." Serah murmured in a whisper.

"I... know this feeling." Lemi murmured underneath her breath.

How could she forget the energy signature that had once gone within her very core?

"It's him...?" Aurora whispered in disbelief.

No, that couldn't be. Something wasn't right.

It seemed that not everyone in the room could feel this strange pressure, or the racing energy that approached them at instant speed.

Only those as powerful as Serah, Aurora, and Gerard, or those who had connections to the source, like Jane and Lemi.

Then there were those who belonged to the last category: those who were the lovers of the source of interest.

"N-no way..." Ana whispered underneath her breath as her lips trembled.

Even Maria, who had yet to utter a word or display any emotion since the start of the meeting found her face morphing to display shock.

"J... Jare—?"

Before any of the people in the room could conclude their words, a sudden flash appeared at the center of the table, like a bolt of lightning from the heavens.

~WHOOOOSSSHHH!~

A wave of white energy dissipated around the source, and the air vibrated all across the room as if paying homage to the presence that had just surfaced.

Layers of energy decorated his body as he slowly rose from his crouching position, his yellow blond hair swaying as he opened his eyes. His white teeth were open for display as he grinned, and his long robe flowed behind him as he seemed to take in the atmosphere in a split second.

"Hehehe..." A slight chuckle escaped his lips as the entire room fell into a standstill.

"I did it..." As he was still whispering words to himself, a second flash of light appeared, once again, sending a wave of energy crashing into the room.

This time, the energy was like a surge of golden lightning, and within it was a young man who appeared regal in appearance and looks. His moderately long golden hair, coupled with his golden eyes could easily steal the attention of any.

However, unlike the first one who entered the room, he wasn't smiling at all.

Instead, he was slightly frowning as he shut his eyes, ready for what he was about to hear from the blond boy beside him.

"I won the race, Kuzon! I told you I was faster!" The one who spoke so optimistically was Jared Leonard, and he was reveling in his victory much to the dissatisfaction of his friend.

"Tch. It was barely by a second, Jared. No big deal..."

Even though Kuzon said that, he was internally freaking out by the prospect of what had just happened.

'Jared... has gotten even stronger!'

It was an unpleasant shock, and one that had soiled the mood he had been in just moments earlier.

"Pfft! I'm faster than you are, Kuzon. Deal with it."

"Yeah, yeah."

Both young men stood upright, their gazes flashing at each other like little kids who had just finished a childish dare or bet.

Perhaps they were too caught up in the moment to notice what they had just done.

... How they had officially ended a very important meeting.

[Moments Earlier]

The world that lay before us was just as I remembered.

As we stepped out of the Safehouse, the instant air of nostalgia greeted my senses. I was initially overwhelmed by the feeling of being home—truly home—but I had to control myself at this very important moment.

First things first, I had to confirm something.

"Haa..."

Using Spellcraft to swiftly address my gnawing fear, I spread my senses to the world. Thankfully, I wasn't disappointed.

"They're here. They're all here!" I beamed, my lips instantly widening as I looked around to observe the faces of my comrades.

We were all gushing with excitement.

"I can sense her... them... all of them!" Kuzon's grin seemed to be the widest.

At least, until I saw Ciara.

"Hehe... hehehe... heeee..." The girl was literally drooling as her eyes brightened up like the afternoon sun.

It was scary on so many levels.

"It feels good to be back." Aloe spoke casually, and her mature demeanor seemed to be the right amount of calmness I needed after seeing Ciara's crazed expression for one second.

"Indeed. I wonder how Ana and Le—" Edward stopped short of his words as he glanced in my direction.

The moment he noticed my smile, he decided not to say any more.

That was a wise choice.

'Let's not get into any complicated stuff now. Let's just enjoy the moment.' I maintained my smile.

However, it wasn't long before I simply couldn't control myself any longer.

I wanted to see them—my parents, my friends, my family, and... her.

"Hey, Jared." Kuzon's voice suddenly interrupted my thoughts, causing me to glance in his direction.

He had a broad smile on his face, filled with what I could only call mischievous excitement.

"Interested in a little contest?" His voice was inviting, and I could almost tell what he wanted to say.

"What contest?" I returned his smile with mine, feeling an electrocuting vibe course through my entire body.

"A race. Let's see who gets 'there' first."

By 'there', he meant the location where Ana, Maria, and a lot of our friends seemed to be gathered. It was probably a meeting of some kind, or maybe they were simply partying.

How could I tell?

"You boys are really immature." Aloe sighed, shaking her head.

"Hehe... hahahaha... I'm off!"

Ciara's voice was the only thing we noticed because the next thing we knew, she had sped off to see her darling, Jerry.

What a weirdo... not that I couldn't understand the feeling.

It was taking every ounce of self control to remain calm despite my ravaging impulses telling me to run wild.

"So, what do you say, Jared?" Kuzon once again interrupted my thoughts, his brows raised as his lips curled into a confident grin.

"You want in?"

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Chapter 1146: Sublime Reunion [Pt 1]

I think we could all guess what happened next.

Of course, I accepted Kuzon's challenge: not because I was particularly petty or anything, no, I was just curious.

Who would win in a race between the two of us?

"Want to join in, Edward?" I asked, but the moment I did so, Kuzon cut me off with a glare.

"Nope! Just you and I!"

As expected, he was looking for an informal rematch between the two of us. Something personal.

'He must be feeling challenged after my fight with Edward' The smile on my face broadened as I nodded slowly.

"Very well then..."

Edward agreed to back down, even though I could see the look of disappointment in his eyes when he did so. He probably wanted to test his strength with Kuzon too.

In any case, Aloe Vida and Edward stayed away from the race between Kuzon and I—which had simple rules.

The both of us had to sprint or fly to cover the distance between our current location and the room filled with our friends. We couldn't utilize Spells, Transformations, and/or Familiars. It was just me versus him.

'Considering the fact that Leo is absent, he's not in full power...!' Then again, in base form, he didn't have to worry about all that.

Once the rules were established, and we went on track, I cast a sideway glance at Kuzon and he did the same to me.

"No matter what happens... we'll have to accept the results, okay?"

It was a simple line, but I had to establish that.

"Fair enough. Let's begin already."

Aloe served as our moderator, though she didn't seem too into the whole thing.

"On your mark. Get set. Go!"

That was the start of a catastrophe.

~BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMMMM!!!~

Space itself ruptured as Kuzon and I raced through the grounds of the world.

Our destination was the Fairy Kingdom within the Western Continent, and we were currently in the Eastern Continent. It wasn't too far, in all honesty, and I estimated it would take approximately a few seconds—at most.

However, these few seconds were the most intense I had ever experienced in my whole life.

In these few seconds, it would be decided who was more powerful in our base forms... Me or Kuzon.

However, I already knew the answer to that.

[Spellcraft] wasn't a Spell, yes I know how that sounded, so it would be my greatest tool in this decisive moment.

But that wasn't all.

My multiple cores could evenly distribute and absorb energy at far much quicker rates than anything Kuzon had in his arsenal. Plus, by using Specialized Cores to actively improve every aspect of my body, using Spellcraft to also bring my surroundings to my advantage, the conclusion was already obvious.

It was my victory!

[The Present]

It seemed Ciara hadn't arrived yet, so we had to have overtaken her at some point. Compared to my speed and Kuzon's it seemed hers was still lacking.

The audience was at a standstill, and I took my time to observe the faces of those present. I saw Jane's stunned expression, I noticed Aurora and Gerard's shock, and as my eyes trailed among the crowd, I felt something... no, someone rush towards me at breakneck speed.

It was a presence I could not forget.

I turned in her direction, and the moment I did so, a gentle kiss landed on my lips, and I felt a wave of her scent wash over me.

'Maria...' I caught glimpses of her silver hair dancing all over, and I felt her body press against mine—so soft and warm that I forgot all about Kuzon and everything else.

I just wanted to be alone with her.

~WHOOOOSSHH!~

I wrapped my arms around Maria and swiftly ascended from the hall, leaving everyone else behind.

We needed some alone time, after all.

Kuzon watched as Jared just ascended with Maria after they kissed, and afterward, he felt his gaze trailing in a direction where he felt the strongest presence from.

A girl was currently on her feet, her eyes widened so her sky blue eyes glittered with light. Kuzon smiled as he saw his little angel.

She hadn't changed in the slightest.

Her small physique, her flat chest, and her portable body... everything was just as he remembered.

~SWOOOOSHH!~

He instantly vanished from his position and drew closer to her, taking her soft hand as he put on his most charming smile.

"Ana..." His lips curled up to form a loving grin, and his cheeks reddened the more he stared into her gem-like eyes.

Ahh... this was youth. This was bliss. This was love.

"... I've missed yo—"

~WHAP!~

A hot, stinging sensation coursed through Kuzon's face as he felt Ana's palm get imprinted on it. Her small hands had pressed on his cheeks, making a clapping sound that sent shockwaves flying in all directions.

Of course, Kuzon had seen this blow coming, but he never attempted to dodge.

After all, a slap from this woman before him was a reward in itself.

'It's been so long... since I felt your touch.' He held her small hands, feeling the warmth of her skin as he stared more passionately into her eyes.

"Y-you idiot... where have you been?" He could hear her whisper, and he could see her eyes fighting back the tears that were gathering there.

Yes. He was an idiot.

Yes. He was late.

Kuzon knew all of that. However, that didn't stop him from embracing his darling, even as she uttered those words.

His large body pressed against her small frame, and she did not resist in the slightest.

It felt like he hands had become jelly, and her body was unable to resist the urge to hug him back. And so, they became locked in an embrace that seemed to completely establish how they felt about each other.

"H-hey can someone tell me—" Jane was about to speak up when Kuzon and Ana had decided to follow the lead of Jared.

~WHOOOOOSHHH!~

In no time, Kuzon vanished from his position, leaving a room full of confused people, staring at each other and wondering what in the world had just happened.

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[SPELLCRAFT: Reincarnation Of A Magic Scholar](#)

Chapter 1147: Sublime Reunion [Pt 2]

"JEEERRRRYYYYY!!!"

The passionate shriek of a crying brunette echoed across the room, forcing everyone within the meeting hall to turn in the direction of the sound's origin.

Standing right in front of the room's exit/entrance was Ciara Epsilon, her long brown hair now scattered all over her face. Her bushy hair made her look unkempt, and adding to this bizarre appearance was her tear-filled face, with some mucus dripping from her nose.

Her body trembled fervently as her eyes were fixed in the direction of only one person, and his eyes were now slowly capturing her.

"C-Ciara...?" Jerry's lips parted as he looked past the shivering girl's unkempt appearance and saw the deep fear, sadness, regret, joy, relief, etc., locked in her eyes.

The moment his eyes fully took her in, burning sensations began to sting his cheeks, and red hues slowly appeared.

He tried to control himself, but Jerry found tears dripping from his eyes as he looked at this mess of a girl.

"J-Jerry..." Ciara whispered, her tone trembling with every syllable uttered.

Everyone else in the room was frozen in either shock or curiosity, wondering what would happen next.

'I... I will tell him now! I will tell Jerry how I feel!' Ciara's thoughts echoed in fierce determination, her blurry sight regaining sharpness as she dried off her tears and prepared her heart for what would happen next.

Her friends. Her doppelganger. Her experiences. All of them had prepared her for this very moment, when she would finally be able to confess to the man she loved.

Yes, he looked different from how she remembered him to be. Jerry seemed to have grown even taller, more handsome, more muscular, and he even had nicely trimmed beards on his face.

He seemed much older than the last time she saw him. About ten years, one month, and five days older... if she was to be specific.

But none of these mattered to her in the slightest.

He was still Jerry, and after being separated for so long, Ciara could not hold it in any longer.

She wanted to let her heart out.

"Jerry, I—"

~WHOOOSH!~

Before she could conclude her words, Ciara felt a sharp blur approach her, like the swift flow of the wind. In an instant, the blur encompassed her with its warmth, drawing her closer in an embrace.

The blur was Jerry, and in the blink of an eye, he had appeared in front of her, his arms wrapped around her as he pushed himself closer to her.

'Ahh...!' Ciara's eyes widened as her face turned pink in response to what had just happened.

She could smell his scent. She could hear his heartbeat. She could feel him.

... After so long, she could finally feel him!

"I thought I'd never see you again!" Jerry's voice suddenly erupted, the emotion in his tone bleeding into Ciara's ears.

She could feel him tremble. She could hear his heart racing with every word he leaked out. She could feel his heavy breath envelope her.

"J-Jerry...?"

"I've missed you, Ciara! I... I've missed you so much!"

Ciara was instantly paralyzed.

Hearing the words of the man she loved and missed so much... filling her ears with so much emotion and desire...

Ciara felt like she was sinking in the depths of her emotions.

"I..." She nearly choked on her words as she felt Jerry sink deeper into her, tightening his grip on her, as if he never wanted to let her slip out.

... Never wanted to let her go.

Ciara could feel it from the depths of her heart—boundless joy that wanted to burst out a millionfold. The smile on her face overcame every ounce of worry and fear, and she felt Jerry's warmth completely shroud her.

She felt protected, safe within his strong, large arms.

"I've missed you too, Jerry." She finally mumbled and melted into his embrace.

She didn't want to think about anything more or less.

Ciara simply wanted to live in this moment. Because right here and now, she could finally feel what she had longed for all along.

She was finally home.

Everyone had just finished recoiling from the shock of seeing Ciara suddenly charge in and go through all her drama with Jerry within seconds, and now they were more than merely curious... they were desperate.

What in the world was going on right now?

Why were the ones they desperately sought after now in front of them as if nothing had happened? Also, where were the rest of those who had vanished?

As soon as the latter became a valid thought, a presence manifested within the room, almost as if it had been there all along.

"Hello, everyone." The newcomer's voice, calm and strong, echoed across through the room, instantly bringing all focus to him.

His perfectly toned body and tall frame were the first to catch the attention of everyone present, followed by his auburn hair and the scar on his face.

"It's been a while, hasn't it?" He spoke again, and everyone remained silent for the same reason.

This young man... he had a very powerful presence about him.

Not only did he appear to be an immense barrier that oozed dominating power, but he was also unrecognizable from his past bulky self.

"E-Edward?" The one who responded to his greetings first was Lemi, the Half Elf.

Her eyes were gleaming with so many emotions, but if they could be crystalized into one definition, it would be that of a 'pleasant surprise'.

Her purple and blue eyes radiated sheer marvel at Edward's current form—a much more compressed form of the extremely muscular state he had in the past.

Personally, she preferred the bulky frame, but this form intrigued her. Not only had his muscles gotten even stronger and more denser than before, but the amount of energy she was sensing from him felt unreal.

Her curiosity and interest consumed her, almost to the point that she began to drool at the sight of Edward smiling in her direction.

"I-it has been a while..."

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Chapter 1148: Awkward Tension

Edward was in an awkward position.

All eyes were on him, and yet the one that really made him the most anxious was the piercing gaze of the Half Elf that kept her eyes fixed on his body.

Even though he had an actual outfit on, Edward felt naked—completely stripped bare in front of her scrutinizing gaze.

He felt his heart race at a phenomenal rate, and even though he tried his best not to show it, he felt nervous to the point of perspiring.

'Discipline, Edward. As a Martial Artist, you have to discipline your body and mind!' This mantra kept him sane, and so he maintained his calm facade as he maintained his rigid, unmoving stance.

"W-whoah, Edward!" Lemi's voice once again filled his ears as he watched her jump from her position and rush to him in the blink of an eye.

Within a second, she was right in front of him.

'S-she's too close!'

As someone who had been celibate all his life, who had abandoned worldly passions so that he could obtain enlightenment, he hadn't given in to emotions like this in what felt like an eternity.

No, it was more like he hadn't felt anything remotely close in a while.

However, with this Half Elf right in front of him, her eyes sparkling in wonder as she devoured his body with her gaze alone, Edward began to feel his body and mind reacting.

He could feel something rise within him.

"You've really changed a lot! For real! Look at you!" She went further than simply uttering words this time.

Her small, soft hands went to his bulging muscles and she began to feel them up with zero restraint.

"Look at them... so tough! They feel so different from before. Ahh... you've really changed a lot, haven't you?"

Edward felt like a toy in front of his young woman... like a subject of examination, merely experimented on and dealt with as the researcher pleased. Despite being a human with feelings and a sensitive body, this girl didn't care about that in the slightest.

It was like she didn't see him as a person!

Anyone one would get upset if they were being treated so disrespectfully.

But not Edward.

"Y-you've changed too..." He managed to finally whisper, trying any other embarrassing sound he would make if he was too careless.

It took all his willpower, but Edward was about to put his body under control, even as Lemi massaged his chest.

"Ah, you think so?" She finally stopped stroking his body, responding to his earlier assertion.

"Y-yeah..." Edward could only mumble out.

"Really? Ah, must be my hairstyle. I cut my hair cus it kept getting longer."

"I-It suits you..."

"..."

At this point, both Edward and Lemi were silent.

Only the heavens could tell what was going on in their minds as they stared at each other, and then looked away a split second later.

Edward was using his willpower to control his body's reaction, so he wasn't blushing or displaying any sort of reaction that could be interpreted as romantic interest.

As for Lemi, her face was generally the same as well.

However, when considering the control Elves—specifically the females—had over their bodies, it was possible that Lemi was also hiding something from Edward.

Unfortunately, neither of them displayed any of the swirling emotions within them, hence creating an awkwardly tense atmosphere.

"M-my dad, your very good friend, just ran off with a woman, can you believe it? He didn't even bother to look in my direction. Hmmph!" Lemi retracted her hands, folding them sharply as she almost instantly switched gear from being playful to slightly annoyed.

One could only guess the reason why she was taking this approach now, or why she never really seemed to mind prior to Edward showing up.

"Well, I apologize on behalf of Jared. He shouldn't have done that."

"R-right? What a jerk! You should never treat a woman like that."

"I'd never treat you like tha...t..."

Edward accidentally slipped, unable to control his words, and succeeded in recreating the same awkward atmosphere as just earlier.

A bead of sweat formed on his face as he looked at Lemi, whose arms were still folded. Her ears seemed to be twitching, but perhaps that was simply due to his imagination.

She pursed her glossy lips, and then bit them softly as if stopping herself from uttering any word. Edward felt himself pulled into her lips, but the moment he recalled Jared's face, his body stiffened even more, and he found himself feeling even more awkward.

'What should I do now? How should I resolve this? Argh! I'm such an idiot!'

Why did he have to resort to such a cheesy line? Here was a girl who was telling him about her dad not paying her much attention, yet he managed to make the subject about him.

As a result, the atmosphere had taken a plunge for the worst... or so he thought.

"Y-you better not..." Lemi whispered, almost as if trying her hardest not to show any emotion in her voice.

It affected her words so much that Edward couldn't quite make out what she said.

"What was that?" He mumbled in curiosity.

"I said it's good to have you back. T-that's all!"

"O-ohhh... it's good to be back. I-it's also good... to see you again..."

For the third time, yet another awkward atmosphere took charge, and the two found themselves fidgeting like awkward teenagers.

Perhaps this was the prompt that finally made the silent audience intervene. The exchange between the two had finally become too painful to watch.

"Could everyone just calm the heck down? You just storm in all of a sudden, with no explanation, and you expect us to watch you all silently? What kind of nonsense is that?" Jane was the first to speak up.

She flexed her glasses, and her furrowed brow contained annoyance mixed with frustration.

"You all have some explaining to do! Edward, Ciara, what in the world happened!"

Jane's voice seemed to garner the unanimous support of everyone who had been in the meeting hall prior, though one of the seated ones seemed to be contemplating something else.

"W-well..." Edward was dumbstruck by the question.

It wasn't like he didn't have any answers, but he wondered where exactly he ought to start from.

A lot had happened since they were all teleported away from their homeworld, and there was a lot to reveal. He just wasn't sure if he was the right person to say all of them.

"I think it's—"

"Where is Neron?" Serah Crimson's voice interrupted Edward the instant he chose to say anything.

She was now on her feet, her crimson eyes fixated on Edward.

"I don't see him. I don't sense him anywhere. Where is he?" She asked once more, and this seemed to invite pressure into the room.

Everyone in the hall was no longer concerned about what had happened, but now considered the same thing their strongest member wanted to know.

The whereabouts of Serah's husband.

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Chapter 1149: Evident Changes [Pt 1]

Awkward silence permeated the meeting hall, a response to the tense question posited by Serah.

Where was Neron?

Edward found himself being the center of attention for this question, and he utterly regretted it.

He glanced in Ciara's direction, and he wasn't surprised to find her still in Jerry's embrace, with the both of them acting all lovey-dovey as if they hadn't seen each other in a hundred years.

As for his other friends, Jared and Kuzon, they had flown off with their lovers.

'When is Aloe going to show up?!' Edward screamed within himself as he returned to reality and was met with the intense gaze of Serah.

He had to say something... and fast!

"W-well, the thing is... I..." Edward felt more uncomfortable as he uttered more syllables, and sweat began to form on his face.

He surely wasn't suited for relaying such tense news to a crowd of people. Any little mistake would cause problems, and the uncertainty that came with being burdened with such a responsibility made him indecisive.

"T-the thing is—"

"You don't need to stress yourself, Edward." He heard a sweetly familiar voice from behind him, forcing him to instantly turn back to see the newcomer.

"Aloe!"

A bright smile formed on Edward's face as he took in the sight of the woman who had just appeared in a flash of light. Golden glimmers of illumination shrouded her, though they were already dissipating, and her calm smile was enough to melt the tension that was amok in Edward's thoughts.

Stuff like this was more difficult than combat, so Edward was grateful his comrade had just appeared.

"I'll take it from here." Aloe Vida spoke as she took a step forward, the last vestige of her Light Magic fading out

Very quickly, all the attention that had converged on the bumbling Edward began to move in Aloe's direction, and her green eyes seemed to absorb all of them without even flinching in the slightest.

It was only for a moment, but her gaze met Ivan, who looked stunned to see her, though he had a tinge of guilt written on his face. Aloe could only return his darkened expression with a smile as her gaze found someone else.

Asa, the Beastfolk. He looked much older than when she last saw him. He was at least a young adult, with a very fit body that was a stark contrast to the childlike features she remembered.

His bright blue eyes seem to glitter when he looked at her, and his broad smile seemed to stretch his face to uneven proportions, but both Aloe and Asa maintained their silence and postponed greetings.

Now wasn't the time at all.

Aloe's gaze met a few others, and only nods were exchanged instead of actual greetings.

At this moment, there was a more pressing issue to attend to—no, perhaps two.

One was the cause for their sudden reemergence, and why they were able to arrive at the moment that they did.

The second, and perhaps most urgent, was Serah's inquisition about Neron.

It now fell on Aloe's lap to provide answers to both questions; to dispense information accurately and succinctly in order to bring everyone up to speed since the rest of her colleagues were too 'distracted'.

"Ahem! I'll explain everything at length now. Although, since this is quite a long story..." Aloe's eyes scanned the hall one last time, noticing a lot of the people seated were now on their feet, and some had scattered expressions or positions.

Everyone seemed to be in disarray, and tension ran wild.

That wouldn't do.

"... I think it's best if everyone has their seats."

[MEANWHILE...]

'She's different from before...'

As I engaged in the most breathtaking kiss with Maria, feeling her body resting on mine, I couldn't help but feel this way.

We were currently flying very high up in the sky. The wind brushed our hair, causing it to dance around us, but none of that mattered as we were both so immersed in each other.

However, despite that, I couldn't help noticing everything that had changed.

'Her boobs are... bigger. No, it's not just that. She has a much more mature body.' My thoughts echoed as I tried to bring them under control.

It wasn't just my imagination, but Maria was also taller than I was.

'How could this have happened? How long were we away?' I quickly dismissed the bead of sweat that began to form on my face.

Just as I was sorting out my thoughts, also doing my best to calm my racing heart, Maria finally disengaged from our kiss, and I was able to get a much clearer view of her face.

'Ahh...'

She looked far more beautiful compared to how I remembered her—and that was saying a lot, especially considering the fact that she was a beauty back then.

Her face currently had more mature features, and she looked very similar to an adult in her twenties than the girl who was barely 16 when I left.

'Could it be? No... no way!' I didn't want to imagine that possibility, so I shrugged off my thoughts and decided to only focus on the moment before me.

My moment with Maria.

"I've missed you..." I whispered to her, kissing her forehead, and I felt her grip on me tighten. "Haha... don't worry, I'm not going anywhere. Not anymore."

"Liar..." I heard her whisper, and then watched as she pouted.

It was so cute that I felt my heart would explode!

Her blue eyes seemed to peer deep inside my soul, and I could tell that she was really relieved to have me back, and more concerned that I would leave her again.

That fear... it was so deeply rooted within her that I could feel it myself.

"Maria... I'll never leave you. I promise." I decided to fight back the fear with my resolve, hoping... praying it would be enough.

For a moment, silence pervaded the skies where we made our solace, and we only stared at each in that period.

None of us spoke... and we simply enjoyed our company instead.

Then, Maria collapsed her head on my chest and smiled, her white hair dancing all over my cloth. I could feel her different, more mature body once again rubbing on mine, and it just felt like the right moment to ask what had been swirling uncontrollably in my mind for too long.

"You've really changed a lot, Maria..."

"Hm?" Maria raised her head and stared at me, her blank face facing me directly.

"I-I mean, you've grown... a lot. It feels like you're a lot older than before... is all." I quickly added, fearing that she might have construed some other meaning to my statement.

Maria, by most standards, was still the same. I mean, she was way openly bolder than before—but even before I vanished, she had done some really wild things, so I wasn't too surprised.

It was mostly her appearance that surprised me.

"It's been ten years, Jared. Ten years since you vanished."

The moment Maria uttered those words, my brain nearly shut down.

I tried to process all of it, but the only thing that could come out of my lips after hearing such absurd news was...

"What?!"

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Chapter 1150: Evident Changes [Pt 2]

"A lot has happened since you left, Jared..."

Maria's voice echoed in my head as my brain struggled to process her earlier words to me. The fact that this world had experienced 10 years without us.

'That's insane!' My mind echoed as multiple emotions overwhelmed me.

For one, Maria would now be 26 years old, a much different person from the 16-year-old girl I used to know. I had missed out on a lot of time, and a lot was bound to have happened in those years I was away.

Even then... she had rushed to hug and kiss me.

It brought me relief that, despite the years that passed, Maria didn't move on from me.

It was truly a big relief.

"W-wow... ten years..." I mumbled, slowly beginning to get composed. "You've really... held on, huh?"

It felt really odd for me right now, considering how Maria was biologically much older than I was. She was also taller, and she definitely looked more mature.

Just comparing the both of us at the moment, and anyone would get the picture of awkwardness.

"It's no big deal, you know? I mean our age difference..." Maria's words cut through my inner monologue, almost as if she knew exactly what I was thinking.

Her lull face melted my panicky thoughts, forcing me to grow calmer.

"You're still much older than me anyway. If we calculate our real age... you know?" Slowly, her lips curled up to form a smile.

My eyes widened as I saw this, and my heart began to race uncontrollably.

"We like each other. We want each other. That's all that matters now... don't you think?" Her hands brushed my face, and both her palms firmly rested on my cheeks.

A cool smile still remained on her face, and once more... those blue eyes of hers seemed to burrow deep into my soul.

It felt like deep down, even to the depths of my core, this woman completely understood me.

"You're right..." I slowly broke into my own smile, placing both my hands on her cheeks too.

Our faces drew closer, and my smile grew broader and broader.

"I'm sorry for being so late. I'll make it up to you."

"You promise?" She responded, her tone almost feeling like she was teasing me.

"I promise."

"Good. You're going to spill everything that happened while you were gone too."

"Haha... it's quite a long story." I chuckled slightly, a tinge of awkwardness in my tone.

Perhaps Maria's cute face when she asked contributed to the awkwardness, but now that I thought of all the things I had been through... it all seemed like a lighthearted dream.

A dream that had long passed.

"Well, you'll tell me all about it later." I nodded upon hearing her words, and to be honest, I was excited to share my life with her.

"I also want to know what you've been up to all this time."

"Well, that is a long story too," Maria responded, and we both burst out laughing at ourselves and each other.

The heavy burdens in my heart were completely lifted, and I had never felt such warmth as I did now.

It felt so... surreal.

"Enough of that." Maria's face suddenly transformed into a look of resolve, her stoic face steadily opposite mine.

"Now kiss me, Jared."

I was taught to never disrespect my seniors, so... I suppose there was only one proper answer to give to Maria at the moment.

"Yes, ma'am!"

Our lips connected once more, and we engaged in a passionate kiss, bonding more than ever before.

However, as we engaged in this, a question popped into my mind.

'I'm biologically 15... and she's 26...'

Was this really right? Was this wrong? It was something that I had to search very deeply to find out.

'It feels right, though...'

And with that, I continued my kiss with Maria.

"You idiot! You big idiot! You're such an enormous idiot!"

The voice of Anabelle Frederick soared through the air as both her short hands were relentlessly hitting Kuzon's chest.

Even though there seemed to be a lot of passion in her loud voice, and her face seemed to depict utmost seriousness, her current actions were as effective as a powerless child hitting a brick wall.

In essence, not effective at all.

"You fool! You left for so long, and all you can do is smile now!" Ana's voice, so thin like that of a baby, felt like music to the ears of the one who heard them.

Kuzon was smiling smugly as he felt her light blows touch his chest. He enjoyed every beat, feeling the rhythm, and the patterns of her soft strikes.

"You pervert! You like this, don't you? Such an... arghhh!" Exasperation seemed to overwhelm Ana as she must have felt powerless when it came to Kuzon.

No matter what she did, he would consider it cute anyway.

"You... you... you fool..." Tears streamed down her face as she finally collapsed on his chest.

They seemed to be in another part of the world entirely, in a grassy field, without anyone to interrupt them. With the two of them alone, they could finally be free... expressing all the emotions they had locked away for so long.

"I... I've missed you so much...." Ana bawled, streams of tears flowing down her face like a river.

In response to all this, Kuzon simply drew her closer in an embrace and smiled.

"I know. I missed you too. So, so much."

His soothing voice soon replaced her hiccups and smiffs. It was magical, a moment simply dedicated to the two of them.

"It's been ten years, you fool. Where have you been all this time?" Her voice echoed in the vast field as she buried her face into his chest.

However, at that moment, something seemed to shift—for Kuzon, that is.

"Eh? Ten years?" He suddenly carried Ana by her waist and separated her from his embrace.

Once he raised her up, like the child she looked like, he looked at her with a serious expression, almost as if peering inside her.

"W-what are you doing? Stop! Put me down! This feels weird!"

Kuzon didn't listen, though.

He was in deep contemplation, and he couldn't be concerned about the powerless hits Ana's little hands gave to his much stronger ones.

"Pffft! There's no way I'm believing that." Kuzon smiled nonchalantly, finally dropping Ana on the grassy plains, and patting her head in the process.

"You haven't grown in the slightest."

"It's true! I'm 26 years old now, you know? 26 YEARS OLD!" Even though Ana must have meant to be taken seriously, her childlike body, and thin voice, made it difficult for Kuzon to do so.

As a result, he ended up laughing at her.

"Haha! Sure you are..." He laughed even more, causing Ana's face to turn red in embarrassment or anger—perhaps even both.

"You..." Ana's voice suddenly began to change, as it got a lot deeper.

She clenched her fist tightly, to the point where Kuzon was certain he heard the cracking of bones.

"You... should have more respect for your senior!" She yelled at the top of her lungs, the entire field trembling as she unleashed her wrath.

The air seemed to vibrate in response to Ana's power, and even the skies parted.

The immense tension permeating the world around them all stemmed from Ana's words and her outburst of energy.

And, amid all of this... what did Kuzon do?

"Pat, pat..." Kuzon patted her head some more, smiling as he looked down at her.

"Don't worry, little one... I believe you."

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