

SPELLCRAFT 31

Chapter 31

[The Present]

"I heard it all, Liliana... if that's even your real name." I smiled, watching the maid's drooped head slowly rise.

"That's too bad, then..." Her voice sounded, slowly morphing from the kind and gentle tone she was using to a more twisted one.

She lifted her head and smiled obsessively at me, widening her eyes to make a sick expression.

"... I was going to make your death as sweet and painless as possible since you have been such a nice kid. But it appears I'll have to change my plans." Liliana licked her lips.

Who was she kidding? This was probably more preferable to her since she could kill me in the most gruesome way allowed by her mission.

'I know her type... and they are all crazy!'

Liliana, who was taking steps back in retreat, now slowly started advancing toward me. As she did so, I took slow steps backward too. Obviously, I didn't want her any close to me.

"You're not as nice as I thought, Jared. Sneaking up on people, overhearing them, teasing this kind maid with wine and threats... and now running away from me. How mean you are, young master. I'm truly hurt." She said in a mocking tone.

Her intense gaze told me otherwise though. She was clearly enjoying the thrill.

"Haha, is that so?" I answered, showing a little nervousness.

"You fool. You should have just kept quiet about the whole thing. If you had done that, instead of acting all cocky and running your mouth, then maybe you could live to see the night."

Okay, that was too much. I couldn't hold it in anymore!

"Pfft.... hehehe, hahaha!" I bust out laughing, halting my backward movement.

My sudden reaction to her words puzzled Liliana as she stared at me with surprise.

"What's so funny, brat? You're going to die now, you know?" She gave a smile, most likely wondering if I had gone insane from the idea of losing my life at such a young age.

"Oh, no... no, it's not that... It's just, you said something funny just now..." I said, still chuckling.

My amusement was clearly not funny to Liliana as she gave me a deep glare, emitting bloodlust. I endured the murderous aura she gave off, ceasing my laughter instantly.

"What are you talking about?!" She asked, her widened eyes staring at me condescendingly.

My lips curled in a wide grin as I defiantly looked into the maid, now turned assassin's eyes.

“It’s funny that you think I merely ‘stumbled’ on your conversation with that employer of yours.”

Upon hearing this, Liliana froze in her approach to me and stared suspiciously.

“What the hell are you saying?” She asked with an intimidating tone.

“It’s so simple, really. I have been watching you for some time, Liliana. Ever since the party started, no, even before then. You were always a suspect in my book.”

My words were already pissing her off, I could see it. She clenched her teeth and glared at me.

“I’ve had enough of your nonsense. You’re just stalling for time, so it’s best you just die right now!”

Making her move to rush and kill me off, Liliana strengthened her legs. Judging from the cracks that appeared on the ground, she was building up phenomenal speed that would be enough to kill me off before I could manage a reaction.

“Just d-die!”

As I heard this, my already wide grin grew wider.

FWOOOOSHHH!!!

She dashed toward me, blending with the wind as a needle appeared on her finger to deal a fatal hit to me. Unfortunately for my assassin though... it was the end of the line.

Her body suddenly stopped moving, mere inches from me. The needle she stretched toward me was a close distance from piercing my skin. It was a good thing she had stopped.

“W-what is... thisss...?!” The maid asked, suddenly feeling a strange sensation course through her.

“It’s about time... it appears my calculations were spot-on,” I muttered, moving from her front and to the side.

“I... can’t... m-move....?!” She stuttered, even struggling to speak.

Her eyes glared hatefully at me, with both suspicion and a hint of fear.

“Of course. And that’s a good thing. I would be dead otherwise.” I answered.

“Y-you did this... what... did you... do...?!”

Finally, she was asking the right question.

“Welp, now the answer to that is quite interesting. But first, let’s put this away.” I said, taking a hold of the needle she gripped tightly. Her fingers became loose at the touch of my hand and without any resistance, I was able to obtain her killing instrument.

“I’m certain you have more on you, but there’s no need to strip you of any other weapon. You won’t be able to use them, anyway.” I stated.

“Y-you....” Liliana growled.

“The answer can be found in the wine you just consumed,” I answered, taking the cup she held in her second hand.

I placed both needle and wine glass on the ground while staring at her amusedly. The expression of shock on her face was second to none.

“That’s right. I already drugged it. Did you really think I would confront you without a countermeasure? The chemicals in the wine induce paralysis, though they only take effect when rapid action is taken and your muscles are in a state of excitement.”

This would make the muscles tense up, causing the drugs to harden said muscles and ensure the one who consumed it becomes numb.

“H-how did you get such a drug? You didn’t even know I was an assassin until moments ago. There’s no way to procure a paralytic drug from anywhere around here. I checked...” Liliana said, still not believing my words.

“You’re right. There’s no way to get a paralytic drug around. Plus, with my age and the constant supervision of everyone around, it’s not like I can make shady deals to obtain a drug. That’s why I didn’t ‘get’ it. The drug that’s currently taking effect within you... I made it!” My voice rang in her ears as I condescendingly smiled at her.

“I-impossible!” She spat in disdain.

“It’s true though. It took some time, but the efforts were well worth it...” I grinned.

“B-but, that is... you couldn’t...” Liliana still failed to grasp what I was getting at.

“And there’s one final thing you’re wrong about... your plans to assassinate me, I’ve known about it for some time now. You and your employer... both played directly into my hands!” A dark gleam showed in my eyes.

Chapter 32

No matter how hard I thought of it, no matter the research I made to correct my errors, I still couldn’t see how my lightning spell could have malfunctioned and caused such a disaster.

‘It was only meant to be an intermediate spell. I calculated everything. The terrain, the energy consumption, the efficiency, and speed... the power! It shouldn’t have gone berserk like that!’ My mind rang.

I went back to the drawing board to be certain, and I still ended up with the same conclusion. And that was because I had not failed in my Lightning spell, I never had.

For a scholar like me to make such a fundamental error in something as little as an intermediate spell was absurd, to begin with.

Therefore, if I had not made a mistake, there was only one option left. Sabotage!

“Someone interfered with the lightning spell and intentionally caused that havoc!” I concluded.

But why would they do such a thing and risk my life? Well, the answer was something I was very familiar with. Whoever the culprit was, they intended to kill me.

"It looks like I was a little careless... I didn't think they would make their move yet." I smiled to myself.

After I was nearly killed by an assassin at merely a few days old, I was barely saved by the little magic cast in my desperate state. Since then, I hadn't forgotten for a second, that there were some people out there who were after my life.

My parents took active stances, and conducted a thorough investigation, even laying off some staff that they deemed 'suspects', and were simply grateful for the 'miracle' that saved their child.

'How lax!' I thought to myself, wondering why they never bothered to investigate further.

Realizing that no one around me was competent enough to ensure my safety, I took matters into my hands. Ever since I was a child, I analyzed the assassination attempt, the motives behind it, and tried reading into whoever the malefactor was.

About five years ago, my mother employed a new set of staff, since laying off so many people at once put a strain on the remaining members of our household. This was when the fun truly began!

My parents laying off our servants must have also been part of the mastermind's plan, since they would ultimately need to find new workers.

With the matter of my assassination dying off, there was bound to be a lowered guard on the part of my parents. Of course, they only selected trustworthy individuals to work as maids, but it wasn't impossible for the enemy to blend into the new batch of servants.

I made sure to memorize the faces, names, and identities of every new member of our household. I also took deep cognizance of their positions within the house.

Of the several who were employed, my suspicion fell on three. One was a tutor of mine who taught me basic ethics and manners. He was way too nice and forgiving, so I assumed he had ulterior motives. Plus, he had such a sensitive role in my life.

The proximity was frightening!

The second was a cook. He was added to the chefs responsible for the meals to be eaten by my mother and me. That was also quite a sensitive role.

Finally, my last suspect was Lilia. She was merely a cleaning maid. Her role was not too conspicuous, and her proximity to me and my mother was fairly average. However, that was exactly what made her suspicious.

'She doesn't stand out, she never gets into any trouble... and everyone around her likes her.'

She was often flustered when I spoke to her, clumsy in duties as a result of her shy nature, and was the most subservient and sweetest servant in the house, with no flaws at all.

However, those charms couldn't fool me.

'She's merely acting flustered to cover up her inexperience in her maid duties. She acts nice and aims for perfection because she must be a professional at pretense. Her face and body are the very definitions of beauty. It's questionable how someone like her became a maid, to begin with. Men would have taken her as their wife long ago, and it wouldn't be difficult finding a suitor with her personality.

'Even if he's a lowly noble, her life would be far better than this...'

Of course, I showed no bias and investigated every one of my suspects to the most of my abilities.

Whenever I wasn't training with Alphonse or engaged in my personal activities, I made sure to analyze their movements and mannerisms.

Using the elimination game, I struck them out one at a time. My etiquette teacher left after I was done with my training, not making any move on me. This left only the Jez, the cook and Liliana, the cleaning maid.

What made Liliana the prime suspect, and my assassin was that she gave herself away during my last match with Alphonse.

The lightning strike incident, where almost all the servants gathered to watch... the servants with exception to the personal cooks who were tasked with preparing our meals so we wouldn't be hungry after my fight with Alphonse was over.

Jez was in the kitchen, and since I kept close tabs on him, I was certain he didn't witness my fight with Alphonse.

The only one among my prime suspects who did... was Liliana.

'She's the next assassin!' I smiled.

However, discovering someone is a killer, and turning the tables on them are two different things entirely.

Chapter 33

'Her record is flawless, so there's no real evidence that she's an assassin. Even if I were to report her to my mum, without any evidence, it would just be dismissed.'

Anabelle would probably think I didn't like Liliana or something, and since my mother was so kind, she wouldn't throw a kind girl like her out of our household.

'Plus, I'm still only a child. There's a limit to how credible I am!'

Using this rationale, I realized that I needed to take matters into my hands. However, even that posed another problem.

'Liliana is a magic-user, and judging from the fact that she was able to interfere with my spell, it means she must be a high-level one.

During magic training with Alphonse, the magic sensors are deactivated, since magic would be used in the courtyard. All the spectating servants were in the courtyard's borders, so if one of them used magic, no alarm would go off.

It was a perfect stage.

'I have to admit, I was careless... I didn't foresee them making a move back then. But, with the benefit of hindsight, it all makes sense!'

With my current magic power, directly facing a very skilled Magic-User who was intent on killing me would be very risky and suicidal. I wasn't going to take any chances.

Fortunately, the whole disaster brought a solution to my grasp. Alphonse's use of herbs to cure my mom of her Mana Shock.

'T-that's it!' I beamed.

Alphonse left the next day after the incident, giving me the recipe for the Mana Shock cure. I also went to the library and took several books on herbs and their uses, spending some time in our family's greenhouse, and familiarized myself with the wonders of nature.

It took me five days, but I finally figured out the perfect concoction to use. It left no traces, was perfectly odorless, tasteless, and would get the job done.

Of course, I tweaked the effects a little to ensure the herbs produced the results I wanted.

'They're all comprised of chemicals, and ultimately, it's the chemicals that are needed to complete the job!'

Using distillation techniques, I separated the unnecessary parts of the herbs and relied solely on the chemical extracts to produce my end result.

With this, there was only one thing left to do... wait for the appointed time, and execute the mission!

The party was more perfect than I could have imagined. It made everything so much easier, and I was extremely happy about Anabelle's thoughtlessness, though I showed the opposite.

With so many people present, it posed the perfect opportunity for the deed to be done!

Unfortunately, my mother dragged me along to greet the guests, taking away any free time I had to execute my plans. It wasn't all bad though, since by mingling, I could still keep tabs on Liliana.

As the party furthered, I noticed that our dear maid was displaying subtle, yet suspicious signs and would soon leave the party.

There was no way I could miss this chance! I began to express exhaustion and moved sluggishly while making my facial expression appear tired.

Of course, my mom, being who she was, noticed this in no time. Anabelle was too considerate for her own good, and there was no way she would let me keep greeting people when I was tired.

"... let's meet up in five minutes to resume the greetings." Anabelle smiled at me.

I was glad the plan worked well, spotting that Liliana was already exiting through the secret path.

Taking two glasses of wine, which I deemed fit for the potion I made, I took my leave from the party as well.

On my way, I drugged the appropriate wine glass and made my way to the inconspicuous part of the backyard garden where Liliana had decided to communicate with her employer. It seemed like she was only talking to herself, but I knew better.

A grin formed on my face as I listened in to their conversation. As I overheard them, I went over what I learned in the past week.

Liliana only spoke to her employer once in a while. After her failed attempts at assassinating me, I knew she would try speaking to him as soon as possible.

However, if she did so, it was sure that Liliana would be ordered to speed up the assassination and would kill me before I completed the drug I was in the process of making.

Therefore, the perfect solution for that was the consequences brought about by Anabelle's mana shock.

The entire household became busy, and patrols were held more often. With security and surveillance now tighter than ever, Liliana couldn't speak to her boss at all.

The preparations for my party were also something that consumed everyone's time. With the maids being busier than usual, Liliana hardly had a moment to herself.

It only made sense that my Farewell Party was the perfect moment for her to sneak out and talk to whoever was in charge.

Upon hearing enough of their conversation, I was happy that the mastermind was indeed what I predicted.

'Okay, that's enough... I don't have all day.' I reasoned, feigning footsteps.

This caught Liliana's attention, bringing us to the situation we found ourselves in now.

"Do you understand, now?" I asked, smiling playfully at the petrified young lady.

Her eyes bulged in shock as she absorbed everything I told her.

"You... thought of all that...?!" Her lips moved slowly.

Of course, a mere child couldn't think so far ahead and plan things so meticulously. I relied on this fact in the execution of my plans.

Even if the drug was undetectable, it wasn't completely so. If Liliana, as an assassin was wary of me, I was certain she could be able to figure out my intentions to poison her.

However, since I was a child, she let her guard down. She gratefully took the wine and swallowed it in such a refined way, confirming my suspicions once again that she was no mere maid.

"So, any further questions?" I asked, leaning close to Liliana's face.

With her glare and my grin directly opposite each other, it was Checkmate!

Chapter 34

"You... brat..." Liliana muttered, straining her voice.

It was no use, yet the captured woman still seemed not to have given in to the situation. Suddenly, I saw her face stretch and her lips curl up in a disgusting grin. Her eyes widened as she gave me a distorted evil grin.

“W-what the-?!” I exclaimed, noticing something strange about her.

I instantly sensed danger and leaped away from her body, suddenly feeling a great amount of pressure well up within her.

VOOOOMMM!!!

The tension in the atmosphere suddenly shifted and an ominous aura started leaking out of Liliana. The paralyzed body of hers slowly began moving and before I knew it, she stood upright, now flexing her hands and looking at me.

The fierce expression on her face made me gulp, and the intense pressure she emitted caused a few beads of sweat to appear on my cheeks and forehead.

“You little shit... you got too cocky!” She said, cracking her stiff neck.

Somehow she had gained the ability to move, despite the drug I gave her. This situation was the worst possible outcome, something that guaranteed a total disadvantage for someone like me who wanted to avoid a direct confrontation, to begin with.

“You’re one hell of a smart bastard, I’ll give you that. I didn’t think you planned that far ahead and played me for a fool...” She began speaking, digging her hands into her maid uniform to bring out several more needles from within it.

“... However... it seems you’ve overlooked one simple factor. Magic!” Her demented grin grew wider.

Instantly, her body became coated with mana, shining in a faint color in the darkness that surrounded us.

“Y-you... why are you using magic? The alarms will be sure to-” I said, showing nervousness.

“Don’t bother! No one will be coming to your aid and no alarm will be set off!” Liliana stated, clearly enjoying how my eyes darted all around me.

“W-wha-?! What did you do?!” I burst out, glaring at the devilish assassin.

“You really didn’t think this through, did you? I was using magic to communicate with my employer, yet the magic detector never picked up the mana being used to transmit our sounds.” She smiled.

“A-ah...?!” My eyes bulged as more sweat ran down my cheeks.

“That’s right! For a few minutes, I can disable the magic detector with a counter magic tool, a jammer to be precise!” She replied, bringing out a tiny object from her maid outfit.

‘Just how many things does she have hidden underneath that garment?!’ My mind rang.

“It’s a good thing you blabbed away like a fool while I slowly used my magic to cure myself of the paralytic effects of the drug you gave me, undoing its effects,” Liliana remarked.

“My body still feels weak, and my nerves aren’t in their top form, but with enhancement magic, that poses no problem. It appears your plan has failed, you lose!”

Apparently, it wasn’t ‘Checkmate’! Was I being in too much of a hurry? Did I rush things too much? Had I underestimated my opponent?

Liliana began advancing slowly, filling the needles she had with magic. This caused the tiny, sharp spikes of death to glow light blue.

“You had me flustered for a second, but this is truly the end! I’ll wrap things up quickly since I can’t use the jammer for very long. It’s a shame... I really would have enjoyed making you suffer!”

With this final statement, and a cruel smile clearly written on her face, Liliana lunged at me, having three needles on each hand, interlocked between her fingers. A single hit would prove fatal since she was targeting compromising spots in my body.

‘I’m too slow to dodge her enhanced movements. The magically strengthened needles will easily tear through my skin like butter and pierce even my most inner recesses.’

As her pace quickened and dust flew from the contact her feet made with the ground, it appeared as though I neared my death.

I should have known that she would be able to use magic. Since Liliana was able to interfere with my Lightning magic, she had to be a skilled mage. Using healing magic and enhancements were not beyond her.

“Now die, brat!” She yelled excitedly.

If only I had thought of it... I would have made a countermeasure... Why didn’t I think of a scenario like this?

A smile formed on my face as I closed my eyes.

‘It looks like this is the end...’

Liliana’s mana slowly faded the closer she got to me, and her enhanced body suddenly trembled, causing it to grow stiff once again. The woman’s eyes bulged as she noticed the changes that were occurring, and without her volition, her body came to an abrupt halt.

I opened my eyes to find her needles once again close to my body, merely inches apart. Her body trembled and it was clear the young lady had lost control.

“W-wha-?!” She suddenly lost her ability to speak, and her face depicted severe pain and shock.

My smile grew wider and the scared, shocked, and flustered look I had feigned vanished. Instead, my expression was replaced with a condescending one. With a stoic face and dead, cold eyes, I stared at the suffering woman.

Her eyes depicted that she had tons of questions which was totally understandable.

Anyone who witnessed the scene would be confused.

“You stalled for time by letting me waste my time explaining the details of my plans to you. You healed yourself with magic and enhanced your body so it would be in an optimal state. You killed me and completed your mission. The end...” I mumbled, walking past her while observing her frozen body.

She seemed to be trying to say something, struggling to form words, but it was of no use.

“... At least, that was how it was supposed to go. Right, Liliana? However, this sudden situation has occurred, and you have no idea what has happened.”

I circled the poor maid, like a shark revolving around its prey, finally arriving once again in front of her.

“You must be utterly confused right now. I should enlighten you, shouldn’t I?”

Chapter 35

“You must be utterly confused right now. I should enlighten you, shouldn’t I?” I said, stroking Liliana’s cheeks lightly as I watched her glare stiffen, relax, and stiffen once more.

The assassin had made two errors in her judgment. They both stemmed from the fact that once again, she underestimated me.

Who could blame her? I was but a trifling child. The events that had occurred thus far were surprising enough. She was certain to think that was the limit of my capabilities.

Unfortunately for the poor miss, she was wrong.

“You were clever, young lady... stalling for time while circulating your mana throughout your body. A most impressive strategy. It’s too bad, you failed to notice...” I began calmly.

She should have suspected that it was unlike me, someone so meticulous, to reveal my plans in such details. I was being a chatterbox and conveniently bought her enough time to fully utilize magic. The reason for that was simple.

“... I was stalling for time too!” I smiled devilishly.

Her eyes bulged, but she couldn’t make any other reactions or expressions. Her body still throbbed painfully, and I knew why.

As for the second error in judgment she made, or rather, the oversight she assumed on my part, was concerning her use of magic. Liliana was a skilled mage to have been able to nearly kill me with my own spell at first glance.

She must have calculated the technique and amplified it accordingly to give her the results she required. A truly frightening woman.

Why didn’t I think of the fact that she could easily use magic to free herself from my paralysis and turn the tables in moments?

The answer was simple... I did!

“Did you really think I wouldn’t notice the circulation of your mana? Or did you think I didn’t predict the outcome where you would use magic? In fact, I counted on it!” I said, taking a few steps back while looking at the sky.

I inhaled slowly, enjoying the night breeze. Now that things had progressed so far, there was no need to be tense anymore.

“Liliana, or whatever your name is... do you know what is happening to you right now?” I asked, narrowing my gaze as I still observed the bright streaks of stars in the sky.

Suddenly, I felt a burst of mana surge from the assassin. This made me lower my gaze, once again looking at her.

The brilliant surge of mana covered her whole body, causing her to move once more. Her vengeful eyes were locked onto mine, full of hatred toward me for shaming her to this state.

“You... how dare you! Forget the contract... this is personal now. I’ll make sure to rip you to shreds!!!” She growled, increasing the tempo of her Mana.

Her body now had an ominous blue glow as she clenched her fist. A single blow would tear my body apart, I was well aware.

Liliana was very strong! However...

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you...” I slowly remarked.

Ignoring my words, Liliana made to move at me, but froze once again, this time it wasn’t just tremblings that shook her.

“A-arghhh... Gahhh... Gahhhhhh!!!” She screamed out in pain, stiffly moving her hands to touch her body, and then her neck.

“U-urkkhh... Ahhh... Arghhh!!!”

Liliana’s voice slowly faded and her body slowed down, but her lips moved nonetheless. Even with her voice gone, they displayed pain unimaginable. Her eyes bulged, nearly out of their sockets, and her body trembled violently, swerving uncontrollably.

I watched the erratic dance Liliana displayed before me, leaping a little away from her so I could watch everything from a distance.

“This... is...?!” Her voice returned, but was quickly drowned in screams of pain and faded again.

“That’s right...” I proceeded to complete her words.

“It’s Mana Shock... and an extreme one at that!”

Her body trembled more violently as she shrieked, swerving more uncontrollably. Veins began showing on her skin, as though wanting to pop out of her body, and her formerly clear and flawless skin began paling up and showing signs of emaciation.

“I-impossible... how can this...be?!”

I moved closer to her, watching as her body danced, freezing at a certain moment, then continuing its frenzied state.

“It is. I made it possible... with the formula Alphonse gave me!” I said, mercilessly gazing upon Liliana’s suffering state.

In medical treatment, there are concepts known as conflicting effects. This occurs when a deadly condition in the body is combatted by another equally deadly one.

“Poisons are often cured with another type of poison. Both neutralize each other and cancel out their effects. It’s the same with the Mana Shock cure...” I revealed.

I had no idea why this hadn’t been discovered yet, but by altering the dosage slightly, I extracted the chemicals found within the cure ingredients, amplifying their effects. The results were as I suspected.

“I can now induce Mana Shock... and you’re my first target!”

Although, this was no ordinary condition. Unlike the case with my mother, Liliana suffered one even worse. By increasing the dosage to a frightening degree, I made sure that the consequences for suffering my induced Mana Shock... would be death!

“The moment you decided to use magic against me, it was all over. I merely waited until the effects of the Mana Shock solution had spread across your body and seeped into your Mana Core. The more you use your magic, the more complicated it gets for you...” I shook my head.

“... So tell me, Liliana... just how much magic have you used?”

The answer was simple.

“Guarkkkk!!!” She coughed violently.

Her eyes were turning bright red, the color of blood. Her body kept shriveling while her skin became even paler.

“P-please... don’t... don’t do this...” I heard her whisper.

At this point, the assassin was struggling to breathe. I watched her pitiful state, not flinching from where I stood.

“Don’t you... want to... know who the mastermind... is...? I-I can tell you... so please, spare... spare my life...!”

‘Oh? So she’s pleading for her life now.’ My mind rang in a little surprise.

Moving closer to her stiff body which was too weak to make any more movement, my face drew closer to hers, directly staring into her red and bulging eyes.

“No!”

Chapter 36

Pale skin. Trembling form. Emaciated body. Strained breaths. Bloodshot eyes. Uncontrollable itching. Shriveling muscles. Unimaginable pain... that was what Liliana was constantly experiencing.

Her very cells popped and burst into tiny fireworks within her due to the uncontrollable mana that was running amok inside her body.

I estimated that within a few minutes, she would die. Yet, here she was... begging for mercy.

“No!” I flatly responded.

The reason behind my judgment was simple. I couldn't trust her. Anyone would do whatever they could to get out of dying, she wasn't an exception.

Besides, her employer was certainly a cautious and intelligent man. I doubt she had any valuable information about him, to begin with.

“You're merely a pawn... and I'm in this game for the long haul. I'm not ruining the whole game because of you.” I said, now turning away from her.

Her expression was hard to read since she no longer controlled a lot of her facial muscles, but Liliana was desperate to live.

I could cure her if I wanted to. All that was necessary was for me to insert my mana and guide her rabid ones. Once I stabilized the berserk mana that was destroying her body, she would slowly recover. However, that was out of the question.

“You're a threat. Not only to me but my family.” I stated point-blank.

That's right. I hadn't forgotten the part she played in my mother's Mana Shock experience. It was due to this very reason that I chose to finish Liliana off in this very manner.

“Now you know how my mother felt... after she stopped that lightning spell from hitting me. Die in painful silence.” I whispered, picking the evidence on the scene.

As I did so, the most interesting thing happened. As a last resort, the dying woman decided to muster the last of her strength in a final attempt to save her life.

“H-HELPP!!! I'M DYING! SOMEONE, PLEASE HELP ME!!!” Her hoarse voice screeched.

After she was done with her loud cries, Liliana struggled once more as she felt millions of cells pop in tiny explosions within her.

“U-Uuu... Uuu...”

I looked at her for a moment with unfeeling eyes. To think she would do something like that... how utterly stupid.

“We have hundreds of guests... the music, chatter, and commotion being generated prevent anyone from being able to hear your voice. All you've done is nothing short of a meaningless bark of a powerless cur. You will die here, and no one will come to save you ”

With my final words, I picked up my glass cup and hers, departing to where I came from.

Ascending the stairs, my face was too tired to display much emotion which I had pretended to have throughout the night, no, for far longer.

In the few moments of solitude given to me, I had a stoic, cold look in my eyes as I climbed the stairs.

'It's a good thing Mana Shock is such an easy way to kill. Not only does it immobilize the target, but it also prevents them from utilizing their greatest assets, Magic!'

Even the greatest of mages were powerless without Magic. The potion also rapidly killed cells in the body and dried up the body. By the time Liliana would be found tomorrow, she was most likely going to be a husk.

'It takes too long, though. I should take that into account...'

My thoughts trailed.

If I tweaked the formula a little, perhaps I could make a more efficient poison superior to the Mana Shock inducer. If that was indeed the case, then it would be a revolutionary discovery on my path.

I returned to the party and was met with the unsuspecting gazes of our guests. At this point, I had already donned my kind and innocent smile, once again navigating my way around the large hall.

"There you are, Jared. I've been looking all over for you." Anabelle, my sweet mother called out.

I looked to my far right and spotted her. In a few moments, we were reunited and I gave her an awkward smile.

"Gee. I really can't let you out of my sight, can I? You spent way more than the agreed-upon time." She said, knocking my head a little.

"Ow. Ow. Mom, that's too violent for a noble, wouldn't you say?" I said, sulking a little.

I gave a teasing laugh which made Anabelle realize I was messing with her. However, since we were surrounded by so many witnesses, she was powerless against me.

'It's not like she'll give me a suplex in front of everyone here...'

I reasoned.

I didn't want to push my luck though, so I didn't take the tease any further than that.

"Did you at least get some rest?" She asked, not failing to give me her usual motherly stare.

"Yeah. I did. I feel better than ever now." I smiled broadly and energetically at Anabelle.

She seemed relieved to hear this, and just as agreed, we decided to continue the hypocrisy of greeting our very important guests.

As I exchanged pleasantries with the strangers, my mind analyzed the events that had just taken place, as well as my plans for the future.

Did I feel regret or guilt for killing Liliana? No.

While it was unpleasant that I had to take a life at such a young age, there was no need to feel regretful about it. Ultimately, I had to make a choice.

'It was me or her!'

I chose me.

More pleasantries were made, and I gave the same sickening laughter and smile to the boring old men and women around, failing to enjoy another glass of wine. It was exhausting, but I persisted.

It was my last night in my household, and I wouldn't be returning for a while. Fortunately, I had taken care of our little mole before departing, and the ripples of my actions were sure to keep our family on their toes.

As for the mastermind, whoever he was, I hadn't given up on him, not by a long shot. I would find him and kill him... just as he tried to do to me.

'It's just as Alphonse made me promise... no matter what happens...'

Laughs and cheers drowned the atmosphere. More noises that seemed like intelligible chatter continued ringing in my ears. Yet, my resolute heart remained.

'... It matters not how it's done. It matters not what ends up being sacrificed... I won't lose. In the end, the final victor of everything... will be me!'

I was given a second chance for a reason. I wasn't going to let it end so soon. In this life, I was determined to live a wholesome, fulfilled life, alongside my family.

I wasn't going to lose anyone close to me, and I was definitely not intent on losing my own life.

Until I reached the very roots I sought after in my past life and become satisfied with my journey in magic, no one was allowed to kill me or anyone I loved. My mother, my tutor, my father, and the new friends I would be making soon... none of them were allowed to die!

With an outward bright smile, yet a cold and unfeeling gaze on the inside, I perceived the entire room. Despite all that had happened, only one thought kept appearing in my mind, and it was never going to disappear.

'No matter what... I will survive!'

Chapter 37

"It's finally time. Jared, you... I'll miss you."

As Anabelle's sweet sobs rang in my ears, I stared lovingly at my mother. Somehow, why did it feel as though I was the father and she was the daughter who didn't want me to leave or something?

I gave her my usual charming smile, the best a 12-year-old could come up with, and reassured my mother.

"I'll be fine, mom. I promise. Besides, this is for the best..." My voice trailed.

As soon as I said this, my expression stiffened a little. She had to admit this was the best alternative, not just for my growth as a Magic-User, but for my safety. To know the reason for that, one would have to backtrack to the discovery the servants made early this morning.

After the party ended late in the night, and our guests left, I was escorted to my room in order to get enough rest for my journey the next day.

My mother also went to her room to relax, since she had exerted herself a great deal to accommodate guests. The servants took care of everything, making sure the cleaning and disposal of wastes were expertly taken care of.

Since I was still mulling over the incidents of what happened during the party, I couldn't sleep.

My mind was working, and I was studying various ways to alter the original poison I concocted to create a more potent dosage and reduce its circulation time.

I could hear slight whispers across the hallway, excited sounds of servants concerning the party we just had, as well as the luxurious foods they got to enjoy as a result of the party.

Out of all the things I overheard while in my study, something stood out.

"Who knows where Liliana is? I haven't seen her all evening!"

I have a brief sigh and continued studying, realizing that the truth was bound to be revealed sooner or later.

And as I rightly guessed, it didn't really take very long before the servants found Liliana's corpse where she died.

It happened early in the morning while they patrolled the area to ensure no single spot was overlooked.

It was no understatement to say that everyone in the house was roused as a result of the loud shrieks brought about by the servants when they saw Liliana's shriveled-up body.

I was told to remain in my room when the servants revealed the situation to my mom, but after insisting on seeing it for myself, my mother allowed me to witness the scene.

"W-when we saw her... she was like this. I-I don't know how it happened or what could have caused something like this, but-!" The servants spoke, clear emotions obvious from the tone they used.

My body twitched when I finally saw Liliana after leaving her to die the previous night. It was just as I thought.

Her body was dried up till the bone, and her bloodshot eyes were nearly popped from their sockets. To say she was just an empty husk of flesh and bones would still not do the terrible sight justice.

As soon as Anabelle saw this for herself, she regretted bringing me to the scene, but as it was too late, all she could do was cover my eyes and whisper comforting words to me.

I found her words a little ironic, considering the fact that Liliana's killer was none other than her.

After covering her body up, the servants took Liliana to the morgue after my mother cast preservation magic on the corpse and told them to add spices and preservatives to ensure the body would be in perfect condition until it was analyzed.

While Mana Shock caused Liliana's death, no one was aware of that fact yet. They never even considered it. Why?

Because no one thought Lilia could use Magic, to begin with. Not even my mother. The maids and servants were employed from lineages incapable of magic, i.e. Inepts.

In the first instance, Magic-Users wouldn't be working as maids when one considered it well.

That was why Lilia's death was bizarre. The mystery remained unsolved even as I entered the special carriage prepared for me.

"I'll make sure to investigate it thoroughly, Jared. So, don't worry about me or this household, okay? Just be safe." Anabelle smiled at me.

I could tell that hidden behind that smile was the anxiety of a worrying mother. She was most likely scared to death for my well-being since another incident of murder had occurred within the Leonard Estate, something that was rarely heard of among high-ranking nobles.

My heart ached a little for Anabelle, but this was for the best.

'The autopsy and magic investigation will ultimately reveal her death to be from mana shock as a result of the lingering traces of mana in her dead cells...'

Once that happened, Anabelle would slowly come to realize their ploy, and even though she won't understand why Lilia died without completing her mission to kill me, she'll be extra careful.

'The next time I return home, I'll be sure to find a much more impressive state of security. This way, Anabelle will be more motivated to protect herself.' My thoughts trailed.

"Ah, before I forget..." Anabelle said, her expression depicting thought suddenly appearing in her head.

She dipped her hand into her long robe and brought out a book from within it. It was dark brown, most likely made from good leather and the parchments would also be high-quality.

"Alphonse's gift came very late last night. You were already asleep, so I decided to wait till today..." My mother said, smiling a little.

'Welp, I'm pretty sure I was still awake, though...' I mused.

"I would have given you earlier, but this whole thing happened, and then before I knew it, the carriage was ready for your departure, and--"

If I left her to herself, Anabelle was going to keep rambling and there was no way I could have that. There were better things the both of us could be doing.

"I get it mom, thanks." I flashed a smile, proceeding to receive the book from Anabelle.

"Well, it appears I've kept you waiting long enough. You should go before I hog you even more for myself." Anabelle laughed.

I laughed as well, and for a brief moment, we stared passionately and lovingly at each other. The bond between myself and this woman, even though it was only for 12 years, was one I would forever cherish.

"Bye Jared, my child. I love you!"

Embarrassing as it was, I pursed my lips and opened them... responding with the exact same words as my mom.

"I-I love you too, mom."

And I absolutely meant it!

The carriage suddenly started moving slowly as the coachman stirred the horses into motion. Jerked by the propulsion of the vehicle, my thoughts shook a little, and a question that had been puzzling me for years suddenly appeared.

Bonds. Love. Relationship.

So far, I had made so many, but the most bizarre one was still with my Magic Tutor, who was still a stranger to me.

And so, as I slowly moved away from the loving gaze of my mother, curiosity got the best of me and I had to speak.

"M-Mom!" My voice called out to Anabelle.

Her eyes lit up in surprise, wondering what else I wanted to say.

"Who exactly is Alphonse?!"

The burning question within me, and one of the few mysteries I had yet to uncover in all my life was now laid bare before the one who knew the answer.

Upon hearing my question, my mother made a spurting sound of laughter as she remained standing amusedly.

"Pfft. To think you're just asking me this now..."

As the carriage drew further away, her voice grew fainter, replaced by the sounds of turning wheels and the clamping of horse hooves on the ground.

Still, my eyes were fixated on Anabelle's face as she gave me the answer. My eyes bulged as soon as I read her lips and heard the faint whispers of the truth that was never told to me all this time.

Alphonse was...

"... your Grandfather, and my own father," Anabelle said.

Chapter 38

She smiled lovingly at me, waving me goodbye. I was too stunned to reciprocate her energy, waving only in a stunned state.

While her answer explained a lot of things, it caused even more questions. To think my own grandfather had been my tutor for so long, and I was left unaware.

"Mum calls him Alphonse... I called him that too. Other than the slight display of affection they displayed once in a while, I couldn't sense any kind of family bond..."

Still mumbling to myself, I looked at the book she had given me before I entered the carriage. Rubbing it slightly with my hand, I calmed myself. There had to be a reason for me not knowing of it.

After I calmed down a little, I looked out the window and caught one final glimpse of Anabelle, as well as the few members of our household that saw me off.

The rest of them were busy taking care of the mess that Liliana's death caused as well as investigation if similar incidents had occurred in other areas.

My farewell was not as exciting or emotional as expected, however... this much was enough.

Soon, the manor began shrinking in size as I drifted further from it. Perspective made everything appear very little, and my mother vanished from sight. Smiling at myself, I retracted my head from the opening of the carriage window and gave a sigh.

"Huu... I've become quite emotional, uh?"

Shrugging off the sentiments welling up within me, I refrained from taking unnecessary thoughts.

"The book... let's see what Alphonse's gift was... or should I call him Grandfather now?" I whispered.

No, that would just feel too weird.

Opening the brown leather book, I saw a letter on the first page. The envelope had a red seal affixed on it, making me slightly curious. Only nobles and distinguished families used such seals.

'If I remember correctly, Anabelle is from a very distinguished magic based family. I suppose it's true that Alphonse is her father...' I reasoned.

I impatiently opened the envelope, curious about its contents. As expected, a letter was within. The parchment in my hands was made from a very exquisite material, and the texture was soft, as well as firm.

I stretched it out so I could read the contents of the letter Alphonse sent. Looking through it, I smiled in nostalgia, reminded of my tutor.

~ Dear Jared, how have you been?

I'm sure by now you're on your way to the academy, since my letter will arrive late. Knowing Anabelle, I'm sure she'll only give you in the morning, on your way to the academy.

Sigh, that woman...

I trust you've been well. It hasn't been very long since I left the Leonard Household, but I already miss you and your mother.

There are a few things I wish to tell you, so make sure you read attentively.

Firstly, my gift to you is a book which contains several mixes of drugs, concoctions, and medicines. There are also poisons and harmful mixtures there, so be careful.

You showed an interest in the formula for curing your mother's Mana Shock, and knowing you, it won't stop at that. To further assist in your research, I decided to give you this compilation of records that I made myself.

I figured it would be better than just any old spell book.

As for the second thing I have to reveal. It something Anabelle might have addressed, but in case she hasn't, I should explain in length. Jared, I am the father of your mother, as well as your grandfather.

It wasn't as though any of us intentionally tried hiding this fact from you, but you never asked. The reason you may not have noticed this is because of our family customs. Our relationships take on many forms, depending on achievement and circumstances.

Anabelle once addressed me as father, and I called her daughter. However, that changed once she became a fully fledged Magic-User. and got my recognition to be a fellow comrade in the art. That's why we now use our names to address each other.

As for why I never addressed you as my grandson and didn't demand for you to treat me as a grandfather is because I was brought in as a tutor, and had to act in such a manner. After your training elapsed, I recognized you as a fellow Magic-User, so there's no need for us to address ourselves in such a manner.

It's funny how our family relationship never defined us throughout our stay together, and even after.

If you take a good look at your name, Jared Leonard Alphonse Sereth, my name exists there. This is because my Magic-Oriented household's name is the Alphonse Household, and my true name is Alphonse Gerald IV. We decided to hand over my daughter in marriage to your father as a result of an alliance between both households. As a symbol of our alliance, our family's name was incorporated into your family's name.

I certainly hope this has answered some of the questions you may have concerning things. While I know all I have said may be too much for a child your age, I know you are a special child, Jared, and do not need to be treated like a normal boy.

I certainly hope you act in a manner that makes both households you hail from proud.

As a pupil who passed under my wing and as my beloved grandchild, I certainly hope to hear of your exploits in Ainzlark.

Take care of yourself, Jared. ~

After reading everything Alphonse said, I had two thoughts. The first was that this was a darn long letter!

'He could have told me all this during one of the times we goofed off. This is a lot to take in so suddenly, damn it!' My thoughts rang.

After taking a few moments to sort through everything I read, a smile formed on my face.

The second thought I had after reading his letter was that of gratitude.

“I’m happy for this, Alphonse. I’ll be sure to do my best!” I grinned, a deep fire of determination burning in my eyes

Chapter 39

There are countless stories passed down from the times of old.

Tales of mysteries that have yet to be deciphered. Legends of beings that defy imagination, and existences that have long since existed.

Of these many tales, one of them has always been embedded into the hearts of men. The Celestial War.

In a world of magic and swords, natural and supernatural, there were also bound to be concepts of gods and demons.

Where there is light, there is bound to be darkness lurking about... and the existence of good births a notion of evil.

And so, now lost to humanity and civility, far beyond the lands inhabited by beings of light, exists a kingdom of eternal darkness.

The Demon Realm!

In this world of the vilest creatures with the most depraved natures, something spectacular was occurring... it was a battle, one among two creatures of darkness.

The stage was set, the spectators present, and the high seat was erected. With everyone watching and the two standing on stage, there was only one thing the denizens expected.

A Fight!

No notice was given before both creatures lunged at each other. Like shadows piercing through the night, their distorted bodies exchanged blows, moving fluidly according to the tempo of battle and clashing.

This frenzied dance lasted for so long, yet none landed a solid blow on the other. They kept attacking and defending, using all manner of abilities to achieve a stalemate.

SWISH

One of the fighters turned their limbs into blades, sending of charging at the other fighter, desperate to win. If no action was taken by the latter, they could lose their lives.

However, it appeared the one on the other end of the blade was faster than the shadow who lunged the piercing attack. The shadow dodged the fatal hit, and in an instant vanished, becoming one with darkness.

Puzzlement filled the eyes of the assaulter, trying to figure out the location of their target. The moment they realized what was going on, it was too late.

A large spike, big enough to tear anyone to pieces, while sharp enough to rend even the toughest of materials appeared from the ground, materializing from a shadow.

SQUISH

It pierced the other dark being in the chest. The sudden force raised the wounded one high, unable to do much but struggle and squirm as a result of its body being impaled.

The being's powerless struggle didn't last for long, as they turned into a shadow too, vanishing from the spike and materializing away from danger.

After reaching a considerable distance from the spike, they fell to their knees, clutching the wide hole that appeared in their chest.

Grunts of pain were heard, though the wounded one tried their best to stifle it. It still leaked out, and from the posture they made, it was clear to everyone who watched, that the one who landed the first hit was superior.

Like clockwork, the successful one appeared, returning from the shadow from where he disappeared to. They walked toward the kneeling one, already assured of victory.

After all, this match had one simple rule. In order not to waste the time of those who watched, the first to land a did hit would be the winner.

Following the rules of the bout, the champion had been decided.

Now standing before the loser as the sole winner of their bout, the shadowy figure gave a very condescending look to the one beneath him.

"I win... you lose. Just as I told you before this all began."

If the loser had teeth, they would grit them. Unfortunately, for beings of their race, such parts of the body didn't exist.

The kneeling one could only clench their fist in powerlessness, realizing the loss and shame incurred on their person.

"I can... I can still..."

The loser could not complete the statement, though. Even they were aware... of their weakness, and how much more powerful the adversary was.

"That is enough." A voice echoed from the highly esteemed seat of the most revered among those who watched.

Seven seats were present there, indicating the highest members of the society of darkness where the beings all resided.

The highest seat, the one in the middle was unoccupied. The supreme ruler of the realm of darkness was absent during such an occasion. However, no one thought it to be strange.

No one could question the Demon King, after all.

There was one other empty seat. It was the seat to the far left, the throne both Shadow beings fought for.

As for the voice that interrupted the fight, it belonged to none other than the second in command of the forces within the Demon Realm.

“The results of the battle are obvious. The next 6th Seat has been decided!”

A hushed silence spread across the open arena. None of the spectators could move or even utter a single word. This was a sacred moment, one that could not be tainted by the slightest bit of sound other than the one who would make the declaration.

“Kahn. You are hereby stripped of your role as a Demon Lord. From now henceforth, the title ‘Noir’ of Shadows shall be passed to the one who has bested you. He is now the new ruler of the Shadow Demon race, ‘Noir’ of the Six Demon Lords!”

Kahn, the defeated, couldn’t say a single word. He had lost, and in such a cruel world, it was only natural for the weaker one to lose everything to the strong.

But, to think the one he lost to was none other than his previous subordinate and right-hand man.

Kahn’s fury, bitterness, and shame knew no bounds.

“Thus, the ceremony and rite of succession shall now begin!”

The Demon Lords who sat rose from their thrones, and the spectators all instantly removed themselves from their seats and bowed in homage to the existing Demon Lords, and the one who would now be crowned one.

The rite began, and time elapsed. Finally... it was done. At this point, Kahn was excused, cast out of the sight of everyone and the attention of the masses was on their new leader.

“All Hail Kyron, ‘Noir’ of Shadows!” The deafening cry of the leader of the Demon Lords echoed throughout the vast lands.

In response, everyone who heard, whether spectators around the arena or denizens who were in their abode, all bowed and paid homage.

“Hail! Hail! Hail!”

“A Hail our Demon Lord, Noir of Shadows!”

The voices of the Demons roared, and all were in the process of homage and reverence to the victor. All except Kahn, the loser.

The former Demon lord narrowed his eyes, tightened his fist, and swore to himself on that very occasion.

Even as he heard the deafening cries and hails of his successor, he could not accept it.

“I swear... I shall regain my position as Demon Lord... no matter the cost!”

At this point, there was no way to do that. However, no matter how long it took and what he needed to do to earn it, Kahn was prepared.

To kill, to destroy, to plunder... to wage war! If he could bring back an achievement great enough to be recognized by everyone, including his lord and master, The Demon King, then he would regain his position.

In a land full of darkness and strife, there was hardly any hope for ambition. All he had left for him was shame and reproach.

To achieve his goals, Kahn's eyes went beyond the dark plains that surrounded him and saw what lay behind the horizons.

Light.

If he couldn't achieve his ambitions in a land of evil and chaos, devoid of hope, he would find his answer in the very place where hope resided.

A place where denizens of chaos were scorned, hated, but most especially... feared!

"I will win... no matter what it takes!"

Chapter 40

"It's finally time. Jared, you... I'll miss you."

As Anabelle's sweet sobs rang in my ears, I stared lovingly at my mother. Somehow, why did it feel as though I was the father and she was the daughter who didn't want me to leave or something?

I gave her my usual charming smile, the best a 12-year-old could come up with, and reassured my mother.

"I'll be fine, mom. I promise. Besides, this is for the best..." My voice trailed.

As soon as I said this, my expression stiffened a little. She had to admit this was the best alternative, not just for my growth as a Magic-User, but for my safety. To know the reason for that, one would have to backtrack to the discovery the servants made early this morning.

After the party ended late in the night, and our guests left, I was escorted to my room in order to get enough rest for my journey the next day.

My mother also went to her room to relax, since she had exerted herself a great deal to accommodate guests. The servants took care of everything, making sure the cleaning and disposal of wastes were expertly taken care of.

Since I was still mulling over the incidents of what happened during the party, I couldn't sleep.

My mind was working, and I was studying various ways to alter the original poison I concocted to create a more potent dosage and reduce its circulation time.

I could hear slight whispers across the hallway, excited sounds of servants concerning the party we just had, as well as the luxurious foods they got to enjoy as a result of the party.

Out of all the things I overheard while in my study, something stood out.

“Who knows where Liliana is? I haven’t seen her all evening!”

I have a brief sigh and continued studying, realizing that the truth was bound to be revealed sooner or later.

And as I rightly guessed, it didn’t really take very long before the servants found Liliana’s corpse where she died.

It happened early in the morning while they patrolled the area to ensure no single spot was overlooked.

It was no understatement to say that everyone in the house was roused as a result of the loud shrieks brought about by the servants when they saw Liliana’s shriveled-up body.

I was told to remain in my room when the servants revealed the situation to my mom, but after insisting on seeing it for myself, my mother allowed me to witness the scene.

“W-when we saw her... she was like this. I-I don’t know how it happened or what could have caused something like this, but-!” The servants spoke, clear emotions obvious from the tone they used.

My body twitched when I finally saw Liliana after leaving her to die the previous night. It was just as I thought.

Her body was dried up till the bone, and her bloodshot eyes were nearly popped from their sockets. To say she was just an empty husk of flesh and bones would still not do the terrible sight justice.

As soon as Anabelle saw this for herself, she regretted bringing me to the scene, but as it was too late, all she could do was cover my eyes and whisper comforting words to me.

I found her words a little ironic, considering the fact that Liliana’s killer was none other than her.

After covering her body up, the servants took Liliana to the morgue after my mother cast preservation magic on the corpse and told them to add spices and preservatives to ensure the body would be in perfect condition until it was analyzed.

While Mana Shock caused Liliana’s death, no one was aware of that fact yet. They never even considered it. Why?

Because no one thought Liliana could use Magic, to begin with. Not even my mother. The maids and servants were employed from lineages incapable of magic, i.e. Inepts.

In the first instance, Magic-Users wouldn’t be working as maids when one considered it well.

That was why Liliana’s death was bizarre. The mystery remained unsolved even as I entered the special carriage prepared for me.

“I’ll make sure to investigate it thoroughly, Jared. So, don’t worry about me or this household, okay? Just be safe.” Anabelle smiled at me.

I could tell that hidden behind that smile was the anxiety of a worrying mother. She was most likely scared to death for my well-being since another incident of murder had occurred within the Leonard Estate, something that was rarely heard of among high-ranking nobles.

My heart ached a little for Anabelle, but this was for the best.

'The autopsy and magic investigation will ultimately reveal her death to be from mana shock as a result of the lingering traces of mana in her dead cells...'

Once that happened, Anabelle would slowly come to realize their ploy, and even though she won't understand why Liliana died without completing her mission to kill me, she'll be extra careful.

'The next time I return home, I'll be sure to find a much more impressive state of security. This way, Anabelle will be more motivated to protect herself.' My thoughts trailed.

"Ah, before I forget..." Anabelle said, her expression depicting thought suddenly appearing in her head.

She dipped her hand into her long robe and brought out a book from within it. It was dark brown, most likely made from good leather and the parchments would also be high-quality.

"Alphonse's gift came very late last night. You were already asleep, so I decided to wait till today..." My mother said, smiling a little.

'Welp, I'm pretty sure I was still awake, though...' I mused.

"I would have given you earlier, but this whole thing happened, and then before I knew it, the carriage was ready for your departure, and-"

If I left her to herself, Anabelle was going to keep rambling and there was no way I could have that. There were better things the both of us could be doing.

"I get it mom, thanks." I flashed a smile, proceeding to receive the book from Anabelle.

"Well, it appears I've kept you waiting long enough. You should go before I hog you even more for myself." Anabelle laughed.

I laughed as well, and for a brief moment, we stared passionately and lovingly at each other. The bond between myself and this woman, even though it was only for 12 years, was one I would forever cherish.

"Bye Jared, my child. I love you!"

Embarrassing as it was, I pursed my lips and opened them... responding with the exact same words as my mom.

"I-I love you too, mom."

And I absolutely meant it!

The carriage suddenly started moving slowly as the coachman stirred the horses into motion. Jerked by the propulsion of the vehicle, my thoughts shook a little, and a question that had been puzzling me for years suddenly appeared.

Bonds. Love. Relationship.

So far, I had made so many, but the most bizarre one was still with my Magic Tutor, who was still a stranger to me.

And so, as I slowly moved away from the loving gaze of my mother, curiosity got the best of me and I had to speak.

“M-Mom!” My voice called out to Anabelle.

Her eyes lit up in surprise, wondering what else I wanted to say.

“Who exactly is Alphonse?!”

The burning question within me, and one of the few mysteries I had yet to uncover in all my life was now laid bare before the one who knew the answer.

Upon hearing my question, my mother made a spurting sound of laughter as she remained standing amusedly.

“Pfft. To think you’re just asking me this now...”

As the carriage drew further away, her voice grew fainter, replaced by the sounds of turning wheels and the clamping of horse hooves on the ground.

Still, my eyes were fixated on Anabelle’s face as she gave me the answer. My eyes bulged as soon as I read her lips and heard the faint whispers of the truth that was never told to me all this time.

Alphonse was...

“... your Grandfather, and my own father”