

A Journey Unwanted

#Chapter 1: Auxiliary - - Read A Journey Unwanted

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Name: Fiona Achenbach

Age: 20

Height: 170cm

Bio: Fiona is a young prodigy who easily secured her position as a professor's aide at Luminare Academy. She had also attended the very same Academy when she was younger. She is a rare race of demi-humans called Solkari, individuals who possess features like that of a wolf.

Name: William Gregory

Age: 15

Height: 170cm

Bio: A member of the esteemed and well-known noble Gregory family. Though he was never treated with any respect due to his lack of blessing from the Goddess Isadora. William detests his father for causing Agatha, his fraternal twin, such misery. William is a kind-hearted boy with not much going for him. But he just wishes his sister the best.

Name: Agatha Gregory

Age: 15

Height: 166cm

Bio: The prized daughter of House Gregory, sent out to gain glory for her family. Being the only recently born spawn of Isadora, all the pressure was directed to her. Grueling training seemed more like torture to her in her much younger days. She cannot fail, and she cannot be humiliated. She must succeed.

Name: Princess Mirabella

Age: 15

Height: 176cm

Bio: The second in line for the throne, Mirabella is quite the character. Some may see her as hot-headed or even sadistic due to her reputation for violence. Her father, the king, could not even marry her off due to her maiming her would-be suitors.

Name: Juliana ???

Age: 15

Height: 150cm

Bio: ???

Name: Victoria Eizenberg

Age: 19

Height: 176cm

Bio: A daughter of the esteemed noble family, the Eizenbergs. Like many in her family, she is a spawn of the God Almeric, the God of knowledge and alchemy. Which explains her genius. Many see her as scheming and unpredictable, but really she is but a simple girl.

Name: Lucinda ???

Age: 17

Height: 178cm

Bio: The 'only' spawn of Octavia. And a third-year student at Luminare Academy, everyone knows this girl. Entire kingdoms would fight to have her, her worth was simply that much. But does anyone truly know this girl? Or is that simply all she is? A popular and powerful figure? Perhaps there is more to this girl, only the future can tell.

Name: Mikoto Yukio

Age: 15

Height: 162cm

Bio: ???

Name: Guinevere Fae

Age: ???

Height: 175cm

Bio: Guinevere, an old friend of Alexander and the court mage herself, holds an impressive ranking considering she is not a spawn. And quite the beauty to boot with a good eye for any interest that might ease her boredom.

Name: Lukas Stark

Age: 19

Height: 178cm

Bio: From the esteemed House Stark, a house where the capital of Galadriel's most prominent knights hail from. Though a knight in training, his skills put him above others in his age group, and he was assigned to be the personal guard of the first princess. Though he often finds himself having to babysit all three sisters.

Name: Aegraxes

Height: 190cm

Age: unknown

Bio: ???

Chapter 2: Prologue: An unwanted start

[Keio University Hospital]

"You know, I really wish you wouldn't waste time and visit me like this."

"Please, I'd hardly call visiting my mom in the hospital 'a waste of time'." Mikoto shot back as he placed new flowers in the basin next to his mother.

"You know what I mean. I'm not randomly croaking on this hospital bed, you know? You heard the doctor; she said I'd be fine to go home in about a week or so." His mother started. Despite her 'health' problems, her beauty was not diminished as she sat upright on the hospital bed, her long jet black hair falling down her shoulders perfectly sculpting her heart-shaped face where not a single wrinkle could be found. She had a pair of plush and rosy lips with oval-shaped eyes. Two intense grey orbs stared him down. For a woman in her forties, she looked well. "You're still young, honey. You should be out partying, bringing home girls, and living a little." Hearing his mother's words, he just gave an exaggerated gasp.

"An Asian mom encouraging her son to do something besides studying? Mom, I think hell just froze over." The only response he got was a chuckle and a lazy punch to the arm. "Child abuse now too? Oh, how you have fallen." He said it in a dramatic voice.

"Watch yourself, young man. Keep talking like that; I might actually take you over the knee." She joked.

"Ooh, scary." Mikoto threw both his hands up in mock surrender. "But seriously, it's good to see you so lively. When you had that heart attack..."

"C'mon, I may be getting old, but heart problems isn't going to do in your mom. Besides, I'd like a more dramatic death." Mikoto could just sigh at his mother's words.

"Dramatic? What's that even entail?" He questioned.

"Obviously, to go out with a bang. Like those manga characters." His eyes widen at the mention of manga.

"Hold on, have you actually read the manga I left for you?" He was bemused.

"Of course, even mommy here gets bored. But did you seriously have to leave me something as disturbing as that 'Berserk' one? I mean, it was cool, but no wonder you're so edgy."

"Well, hehe. I thought you'd appreciate the darker stories, seeing as you like that Game of Thrones show." He said it with a sheepish laugh, but realization quickly hit him. "Hold on. I'm not edgy, though! Where did you even learn that word?"

"Well, Hinata told me all about these 'slang' words you youngsters use. I thought I'd educate myself so I could understand you better." Mikoto just sighed at his mother.

"I don't think you could properly incorporate 'slang' into Japanese." He muttered as he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. "Damn...it's 2 already?"

"It's fine, Mikoto. Just make sure to bring your sister next time, Kay? I miss the little munchkin."

"Alright, I'll make sure to drag Hinata's lazy ass here." He said as he gave his mother a kiss on the cheek.

"That's 100 Yen in the swear jar."

"Yes mother." He shot back in an overly professional voice as he exited the hospital room. Moving down the hallways of the hospital, he took the first elevator to the ground floor, waving a few nurses goodbye as he reached the ground floor.

The young man exited the hospital and walked onto the streets of Tokyo.

Tokyo was a bustling place as always. The skyline was as always full of high-rise buildings, including the Tokyo Skytree.

The streets were full with activity, with people hurrying to their destinations and cars and buses zipping by. The city was home to a vast array of street vendors too, including food stalls selling traditional Japanese for the tourist.

Even with him having lived in this city for years now, Mikoto still could not help but take in the sights. It helped that he was in such a good mood; his mother was finally almost ready to be discharged from the hospital. Of course, a big party was already planned for his dear mother; everyone was going to be there. All his aunts and uncles were there to welcome her back. So of course he could not help but feel giddy; there was even a spring in his step.

Things were finally looking up.

BEEP!!! BEEP!!!

The sound of loud beeping assaulted his eardrums, as well as the sound of scattering pedestrians and a roaring engine. Looking to his side, he saw a large black truck barreling towards him at frightening speeds. It cut right through the railings, separating the sidewalk from the road, and it seemed to have no intention of slowing down.

Despite the speed, it was still a bit far away, so he had time to run away. But before any such action could be taken, he heard an odd noise behind him, as if something were scraping against the air. What followed was someone pulling him at the back of his shirt.

This mystery person seemed to have absurd strength as his feet involuntarily left the ground as he was pulled back. A strange sensation washed over him as his eye's grew heavy, everything blurred, not long after his eye's shut as his world was engulfed in pitch black darkness.

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Cough! Cough!

Fweh! Fweh!

"What the hell!?.....what the hell!?" Several things were realized at once as he spat all the dirt out of his mouth. Everything was so much darker now, a contrast to things a moment ago. A putrid smell had assaulted his nostrils in no time; he had never had the displeasure of smelling something so foul. Not even rotten meat came this close. And lastly, his voice was different. Vastly different, too different. It was not as if he was talking with a sore throat or that his voice cracked. No, it sounded more softer and boyish.

He also took note of how loose his clothing and shoes felt. He was wearing a black long-sleeved black button shirt along with black pants and dress boots. All of which felt slightly baggy and overgrown. Confusion did not quite justify just how he felt as of right now. Raising a hand to his face to wipe away the remaining dirt, he was promptly stopped as he stared at his hand in befuddlement.

It was so slender and dainty in size. It had a graceful appearance with delicate fingers that taper towards the tips. His skin tone was smooth and unblemished. The nails were well-trimmed and neatly shaped, adding to the elegance of the hand. This hand was a hand he was not familiar with. Another 'what the hell' sat at the tip of his mind, but he was too busy trying rationalizing the whole situation.

("C'mon, deep breaths, deep breaths...") He spoke as he took his own advice, inhaling and exhaling slowly. ("Now....first off. Why the hell am I here?") He questioned to himself as he glazed over his current location. It could only be described as a barren wasteland of dirt, made to be more gloomy by the cloudy sky.

("Was I drugged and kidnapped?") He thought to himself.

That would make sense to some extent, but that did not explain his other problems.

Mikoto lifted his shirt as he stared at his stomach—his new stomach. Smooth, slim, and pale—like a woman's. Luckily, the sicko who captured him had the decency to not change him all the way, as his 'little friend' was still there. Though it was a tad smaller than he remembered.

"Not important right now..." He muttered, still feeling uncomfortable speaking with this new, unfamiliar voice. ("So I was drugged, and then plastic surgery was done on me?") He mulled over all of that in his head as he stood up from the ground.

Pulling out his phone, he was relieved that he still had it and that it was still one piece. Of course, there was no signal, but he wanted to use his phone for something else. Fiddling around with the device, he entered the 'Camera' app and switched it to the selfie mode, only for his eye's to bulge out as he stared at his own apparent appearance. He stared at that boy.

The boy had red eyes and tousled snow-white hair.

His hair was thick and luxurious, with strands that seemed to almost glimmer in the little apparent light. Its texture was soft. The boy's face was delicate and ethereal, with was pale skin. The boy's eyes were the most striking aspect of his appearance. A deep, vivid red, they seem to glow. The pupils were large yet they were also somehow warm and inviting, seeming to be able to pull people in. His lips were full and lush, with a hint of pink and along with that a button nose a small beauty mark beneath his lips.

This boy was him.

"Just what the hell is going on here?" His hand with the phone dropped to his side as he stared at the darkened clouds.

Chapter 3: Chapter 1: A pink wolf?

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Strangeness, the foreign and unfamiliar, often may present itself as an opportunity—a challenge, even—to broaden our understanding of the world and the countless things in it. It dares us to venture beyond the comfortable confines of what we know, stripping us of preconceived notions and obliging us to confront the infinite mysteries beyond our comprehension.

Yet, for all its promise, for all its potential, embracing strangeness does not come without its price. There is discomfort. There is fear. There is a primal resistance—a whisper in the back of the mind that pleads for retreat, for normalcy, for the safety of the known. To welcome the strange is to walk willingly into the fog of uncertainty.

In a world that so often seeks comfort and routine, the idea of welcoming the unknown may seem absurd, even foolish.

However...

At this very moment, the boy known as Mikoto Yukio had absolutely no intention of embracing the so-called "strange."

Because the "strange" had already embraced *him*.

Firstly, there was the setting.

Mikoto did not wake up to the soft sheets of his bed, nor to the warmth of a kotatsu, nor even in a hospital room. No, he woke up face-down in the dirt. A dirt road, to be precise, lined with scraggly patches of wild grass and accompanied by the distinct, nose-wrinkling scent of something rotten. It smelled like decomposing wood, wet hay, and perhaps, just perhaps, something that had once been alive and was now very much not.

Secondly, there was his body.

Something felt off. Not in the typical I-haven't-slept-enough or I-might-be-sick kind of way, but in a deeply unsettling, I-don't-think-this-is-my-body kind of way. His limbs, though responsive, felt wrong. There was an unfamiliar lightness to his frame, as if someone had subtly shrunken him overnight.

Plastic surgery? That was the obvious answer.

Maybe some kind of advanced procedure that left no scars? But who the hell would shrink his height? That alone pissed him off to no end.

Strangeness? No, this was straight-up nonsense.

"Damn, I hope Aunt Maya is smart enough not to tell Mom about my disappearance..." Mikoto muttered under his breath as he trudged along the dirt path, weaving through patches of grass and trees.

He had been walking for hours, yet his body showed no signs of fatigue. That alone should have raised alarm bells. Even though he wasn't out of shape, he wasn't exactly the type to go on marathon hikes. The human body—his body—should have been demanding rest, thirst, or at the very least, some semblance of exhaustion.

But there was nothing.

The thought gnawed at him. His stomach twisted in discomfort, his fingers felt numb. The more he thought about it, the worse it got—this sensation, this wrongness crawling under his skin like an itch he couldn't scratch. He felt like a foreigner inside his own body.

And yet, this wasn't even the worst part.

Because the worst part?

He had no idea where the hell he even was.

For all he knew, he wasn't even in Japan anymore.

"Damn it, you old fool! Just leave the cart and let's go!"

Mikoto's head snapped up. His pace quickened instinctively as he honed in on the voice—a woman's voice, sharp and exasperated.

There. Just up the road.

A large wooden cart, hitched to two brown horses. The thing looked heavy, laden with crates that visibly weighed it down. The road had betrayed the vehicle, as one of its wheels had sunken into the dirt, refusing to budge.

And there were two people standing beside it.

The first was a bald old man, complete with a full gray beard, deeply lined wrinkles, and a scowl that seemed permanently etched onto his face. His attire was... old, like something ripped straight from a medieval painting—a black tunic, gray pants, and brown boots.

The second was a woman, and, well—

Mikoto's eyes immediately caught on to her bright pink hair.

Now, pink hair wasn't exactly unheard of in Tokyo. Hell, it wasn't even uncommon. But there was something off about hers—something unnatural in the way it fell down her back, nearly touching the ground.

And it wasn't the color that caught his attention.

It was the pair of pink wolf ears twitching atop her head.

("Cosplay?")

That seemed like the most logical answer. His little sister used to run around in Disney princess dresses, so he figured people had their preferences. But something about this was too real.

Then the old man barked, "Oh, quiet, you brat! I ain't leaving this cart with all this cargo behind!" The woman rolled her eyes as the man continued. "Why don't you use that monster strength of yours to just lift the damn thing then? Or better yet—your magic. My horses are getting tired."

Magic?

Mikoto's eyebrow twitched. Oh great. A roleplay scenario. He had no idea what the hell kind of backwater cosplay event this was, but at least the people were committed to the bit.

"You hired me to escort you, old man," the woman shot back, her voice laced with irritation. "I keep wild animals and Astrothians off you, and that's it."

"Astrothians?"

Mikoto stopped dead in his tracks.

Alright. Nope. Nope, nope, NOPE.

This was not Tokyo. This was not Japan. And this sure as hell was not some medieval cosplay convention.

Mikoto exhaled sharply.

Well, nothing for it.

Time to announce his presence.

He cleared his throat.

"Uhm... excuse me?"

Two heads snapped towards him so fast he was mildly concerned they might get whiplash.

Shock flared across their faces.

"By the Gods...!" The pink-haired woman took a step forward, eyes wide with disbelief. "As I live and breathe..." she whispered. "A real Spawn of the Goddess Octavia!"

Mikoto blinked.

...What.

Mikoto could only blink in sheer confusion as he instinctively took a half-step back, as if he had just walked into a tavern brawl he had no business being in.

Odd reaction.

"Erm, sorry, but I'm kind of lost," he admitted, rubbing the back of his head.

And while he had about a thousand questions—like why he was suddenly speaking this strange-yet-strangely-familiar language like a seasoned native—he shoved all of those existential crises into the "I'll deal with that later" compartment of his mind. Right now? He was just relieved to be interacting with actual human beings instead of waking up in an abandoned, eldritch-infested void.

"Lost, ye say, lass?" the old man started, his bushy brows furrowing.

The sheer level of bewilderment in his tone made it sound like Mikoto had just claimed to have gotten lost inside a single-room cottage.

Mikoto barely had time to process that before something else hit him. Something horrible. Something unforgivable.

"Lass?"

Did he just—

"I'm a guy, though."

The moment those words left his lips, the atmosphere changed.

Both of them looked at him as if he had just announced that he was the Supreme Empress of the Moon.

"Impossible," the pink-haired woman stated flatly. She even folded her arms and gave him a scrutinizing look, her wolf-like ears twitching in evident disbelief. "The blessing of the Goddess Octavia is already rare enough. And in any known record of said blessing, the Goddess has only ever favored women above men."

Mikoto's confusion was multiplying at an exponential rate.

"That makes no sense. I am a guy. Why would I lie about that?"

Rather than acknowledging this completely logical statement, the wolf-eared woman simply narrowed her brilliantly sharp salmon-pink eyes at him as if trying to uncover some hidden deception.

The sheer audacity.

"Stop being such a harpy," the old man grumbled at her before turning back to Mikoto. "Sorry about her, erm—?"

"Mikoto. Just call me Mikoto," he introduced himself, figuring it was better to steer the conversation away from his alleged womanhood.

The old man muttered something under his breath, rubbing his beard in thought.
"Sounds like an Easterner's name."

Mikoto simply chose not to engage with that.

"Well," the old man continued, "the name's Emil, and this lady right here is—"

"I can introduce myself, old man," she cut him off sharply before clearing her throat.

("Oh? We're fancy now?")

"My name is Fiona Von Achenbach, daughter of Duke Arthur Von Achenbach." She even curtsied.

Mikoto was thoroughly unimpressed.

"I'm sure we'll be good friends," she added, with a confident little smile that made it clear that this was not a suggestion.

"Right... well, it's a pleasure to meet you, Emil-san and Fiona-san."

Instant confusion. Both of them raised an eyebrow at the exact same time.

"San?" Fiona repeated, her head tilting. "What's with putting that behind our names?"

Mikoto blinked. Oh, right. "Well, it's a custom of my people. You know how we Japanese are with our honorifics," he explained with a sheepish chuckle.

"Japanese, eh? So that's the official name for you Easterners." Emil hummed thoughtfully before shaking his head. "Even someone as old as me can learn somethin' new every day."

Mikoto just barely resisted the urge to tell him that yes, Emil-san, that is indeed how civilizations work.

"And you said you were lost?" Emil asked. "Well, as soon as I get me carriage loose, I'll take ye to the village."

Mikoto exhaled in relief. "That would be much appreciated. Do you need a hand?"

"Aye, now that would be much appreciated. Me old bones ain't what they used to be, and this harpy ain't any help, as ye might've guessed," Emil added, shooting a very pointed glance at Fiona.

Said Harpy merely rolled her eyes, shaking her head with a tired sigh.

Mikoto, ever the gentleman, approached the stuck carriage at the back. It looked to be a simple wooden cart loaded with what appeared to be bags of wheat and various supplies.

Mikoto was not expecting to actually lift the thing.

With his frail and tiny new body, he figured he would just apply a little effort, move it an inch, and pretend that he contributed. That was the plan.

What happened instead was:

1. He gripped the carriage.
2. He lifted it.
3. He accidentally sent it WAY too high.

The horses absolutely lost their minds.

A loud, panicked whinnying filled the air as the startled creatures bucked and kicked, nearly knocking over Emil in the process.

Mikoto instantly slammed the cart back down.

Silence.

Emil was the first to recover.

"Well, I'll be!" he bellowed with a hearty laugh. "Who would've thought that scrawny body of yers had that much strength?"

Fiona, however, was completely unfazed. Instead, she merely gave him a "you're an idiot" look and sighed. "Uneducated, are we?"

Emil rolled his eyes, but she continued anyway.

"This... boy is a spawn of the great Goddess Octavia. She is the Goddess of War, Magic, and Navigation. Spawns of the Gods and Goddesses inherit their qualities. It would be surprising if this boy were physically weak," she informed matter-of-factly, as if this were some basic truth that everyone should just know.

Mikoto?

Mikoto just stared at her.

("Gods? Goddesses? What kind of RPG nonsense is she talking about? Is this some kind of elaborate roleplay again?")

Oh. But then, his eyes drifted to her twitching wolf-like ears.

("Wait a minute. Those twitched. Those actually moved.")

His entire thought process derailed.

She must have noticed his intense stare, because just as she opened her mouth to speak—

"Well, thanks, lad. The cart is unstuck, so we can be on our way!" Emil cut in cheerfully.

Mikoto immediately latched onto that excuse to ignore reality.

"R-right. Thanks," he muttered, quickly falling in line beside them.

He did not miss the way Fiona kept subtly glancing at him.

[Beurtenhove Village]

When Emil had said "village," Mikoto had imagined something small and quaint. Maybe a couple of wooden huts, some dirt roads, a single market stall if they were lucky.

He did not expect a full-blown medieval town straight out of a fantasy novel.

The air was alive with the scent of roasted meat and freshly baked bread. The cobblestone streets were packed with merchants shouting their wares, travelers negotiating deals. A beautiful stone fountain stood proudly in the town square, its clear water cascading down into a pool. Lively music from a bard troupe played in the distance, setting a festive atmosphere.

Mikoto stopped in his tracks.

This was not some historical reenactment village. This was real.

And he was stuck in it.

Mikoto was overwhelmed.

Not in the normal sense, where one might feel a little anxious in a new environment. No, this was a sensory overload of the highest magnitude.

The place was bustling—no, exploding—with activity, like someone had taken every single Renaissance Faire ever hosted and smashed them together into one chaotic, medieval mess.

Small, colorful buildings with charmingly crooked rooftops and market stalls packed shoulder-to-shoulder lined the narrow cobblestone streets. Everywhere he looked, there were merchants, villagers, children darting between people's legs, and livestock freely roaming around as if they paid taxes.

A chicken scurried past him. A dog chased it. Then, a child chased the dog. Then, an angry baker chased the child while brandishing a rolling pin.

Mikoto stepped aside to avoid getting caught in whatever insanity that was.

The air was a full-course meal by itself. The unmistakable scent of freshly baked bread mingled with the rich, smoky aroma of roasting meats and something distinctly fried. His stomach betrayed him immediately with a loud, gurgling growl.

Mikoto's eyes trailed toward a large, rowdy-looking building at the far end of the street. It had an old wooden sign hanging above the entrance with faded lettering—probably the name of the establishment—but more importantly, the sound of rowdy laughter, clanking goblets, and upbeat music seeped from its doors.

An inn.

Which meant food.

And possibly answers.

But before he could take another step, Emil suddenly let out a hearty chuckle from beside him, having long since parked his cart and horses elsewhere.

"Well, what do you think, lad?" Emil grinned, folding his arms proudly. "Quite the lively place, innit?"

Mikoto opened his mouth to respond—

"For peasants, mayhap," Fiona cut in sharply, her tone soaked in aristocratic disdain.

Emil whipped his head toward her with the speed of an owl snapping to prey.

"Oh, hush you!" he barked. "Ye see the inn over yonder?" He pointed to the lively establishment up ahead. "Just tell ol' Emilia I sent ye. This freeloader stays there too, so at least ye'll have a familiar face."

Mikoto nodded, relieved that he at least had a clear objective.

"But I'll be seein' ye around, lad!" Emil waved cheerfully before disappearing into the crowd.

Mikoto returned the gesture before turning to Fiona.

She merely raised an expectant brow. "Come now, Mikoto, was it? Let's not dilly-dally."

And so, he followed her.

For approximately five seconds.

Before something horrible happened.

"Look, mommy! Look at the pretty girl!"

Mikoto froze.

A small girl pointed directly at him, eyes wide in innocent amazement, Mikoto's soul left his body.

"It's rude to point, dear," the mother scolded gently, leading the child away.

But the damage had already been done.

Mikoto mentally imploded.

("Yeah, I do not like this face one bit.")

He sighed, rubbing his temples as he stormed into the inn behind Fiona, fully ready to repress this memory forever.

The inn was just as chaotic as the outside.

Warm candlelight flickered wildly, a massive stone fireplace dominated the center of the room, with a whole pig rotating slowly on a spit.

The ceiling boasted chandeliers, their soft light adding to the rustic charm of the space.

The long wooden tables were draped with fresh linens, holding platters of food and wooden goblets overflowing with frothy ale. Merchants, peasants, and travelers alike filled the seats, their conversations merging into a single loud, drunken sound.

In the corner, a group of musicians strummed their lutes, adding to the already boisterous atmosphere.

Mikoto drank in the sight.

("They're really driving home that medieval feel, huh?")

Before he could appreciate it any further, however—

His wrist was seized.

"Come."

Fiona yanked him forward without warning, weaving effortlessly through the chaos as Mikoto stumbled after her like a bewildered duckling.

They stopped in front of a woman wearing a modest green dress, her shoulder-length raven hair framing emerald-colored eyes that immediately locked onto him with a fox-like glint.

"A new one, eh?" the woman mused.

Mikoto immediately felt uneasy.

Before he could even register what was happening, she grinned like a Cheshire cat—then promptly began patting his head.

"Well, aren't you quite the adorable little thing?"

Mikoto's soul left his body. Again.

He felt so much smaller than he already was.

Fiona looked deeply unimpressed.

"The old man bid us to come to you for refuge for Mikoto here," she explained, her voice as dry as sandpaper.

"Mikoto, huh?" The woman—Emilia, apparently—tilted her head, her smile widening. "A cute name to boot, aye?"

Mikoto resisted the urge to walk out the door, across the street, and into a conveniently placed oncoming horse-drawn cart.

"Thanks..." he muttered.

But then—disaster struck.

"But he shall stay within the confines of my room if that is all right," Fiona announced way too casually. "It does have two beds, after all."

Mikoto's brain crashed.

"Uuh, pardon?"

He turned to voice his very reasonable concerns, but—

"Ah, trying to keep him to yourself," Emilia grinned wickedly, her tone laced with blatant mischief. "Sneaky, sneaky."

Fiona stared at her, completely deadpan.

"Well, it's all fine," Emilia shrugged, "just don't have too much—"

"Come."

Fiona did not let her finish.

Before Mikoto could so much as blink, he was yanked away yet again, dragged upstairs like a sack of grain while patrons laughed, drank, and remained blissfully unaware of his ongoing existential breakdown.

As he was dragged to his fate, he couldn't help but reflect on his life choices.

("That Emilia woman didn't seem to make a fuss over my appearance like Emil-san and Fiona did. Good thing these drunks are too far gone to notice.")

But most importantly—

("Damn, I hope Mom, Hinata, and everyone else aren't too worried.")

Chapter 4: Chapter 2: Realization

"So you truly hail from the East?"

Fiona's voice broke the relative silence of the modest inn room, her tone carrying both curiosity and a hint of skepticism.

Mikoto, who had been absently staring at the wooden ceiling beams above, turned his head slightly in her direction before exhaling through his nose.

"Far East, uh, yes. Tokyo specifically."

"Tokyo? Tokyo, Tokyo." She rolled the word around on her tongue like one might test the taste of an unfamiliar fruit, expression shifting between mild intrigue and something resembling disapproval. "You Easterners have quite a strange naming sense," she muttered, shaking her head slightly.

At present, the two of them were seated within the confines of an utterly unremarkable inn room. There was a single window to the left, through which the dull glow of torchlights illuminated the streets below. The wooden floor, worn but well-kept, had a modest rug thrown atop it, doing little to soften the occasional creak of old planks beneath weight. Against the far wall stood a wardrobe of dark oak, its doors slightly ajar, revealing neatly folded spare linens within. And, of course, the centerpiece of the room—two normal-sized beds, placed side by side with simple covers draped atop them.

Mikoto sat on the left bed, arms crossed, while Fiona perched on the right one, one leg crossed over the other as she studied him like a scholar examining a newly discovered species. And in some ways, that was precisely what she was doing.

"Are you sure you hail from the East?" she asked again, narrowing her eyes at him. "Though not impossible, it is passing strange that Easterners should be blessed by a Goddess of this general area. I have more to ask, but I suppose you must have questions of your own, no?"

Oh, he had questions.

Questions like, "What's the quickest way to the nearest airport?"

Or "Why the hell does no one know what Japan is?"

Or, perhaps most important of all, "Why is my life suddenly a convoluted isekai plot?"

Mikoto had already tried mentioning Japan, Europe, the United States—hell, he even threw in Australia just to see if it rang a bell. And yet, each and every time, Fiona had dismissed them as "off-names", saying she had never heard of any such places.

Now, Mikoto wasn't an idiot. He could, of course, assume she was just messing with him, that this was all some elaborate prank.

But she seemed deathly serious. Too serious.

So that left only two other possibilities.

One: Fiona was some isolated, backwater country bumpkin who had lived her entire life under a rock.

Or Two:

("No, you read too much isekai, Mikoto.")

He shut his eyes tightly, pressing two fingers against the bridge of his nose.

He refused to entertain that thought. It was ridiculous. It was insane.

This whole situation was absurd, right?

This whole body changing thing? That was just some sicko's twisted plastic surgery experiment on him, right?

But then what was all this "spawn of the Goddess" business?

Fiona and that old man Emil—they were just crazy, right?

But... then there was the magic.

The very real, tangible magic.

And those very real fox-like ears that twitched atop Fiona's head.

And the very real fact that his body no longer belonged to him.

His throat felt dry.

Could this really be...?

No. No, no, no, no, NO.

The thought was like a pit forming in his stomach, swallowing rationality and replacing it with something much colder.

Was he simply whisked away from his world just like that?

Torn away from his home? From his family?

It wasn't right.

It wasn't right.

Was he just supposed to accept this?

"Mikoto?"

He clenched his fists.

What kind of sick, twisted bastard was responsible for this?

His mother. His sister. His aunts.

He might never see them again.

But there had to be a way back.

Right?

"Miko—"

Yes.

If he came to a different world, then there had to be a way back.

It was only natural, right?

Right?

("Yes, it's only natural. There should be a way back, right? It's only natural that there should be. I mean, I came to this damn world, so there should be a way back to them. Mom and Hinata, Aunt Maya, and everyone else. Yeah, I'll definitely get back. I'll get back, I'll get back, I'll get, I'll get back, I'll get back, I'll get, I'll get back, I'll get back—")

"Mikoto!"

His entire body jolted as Fiona practically shouted his name.

His breath came in short, uneven bursts, and only now did he realize that his nails had been digging into his palms.

His eyes darted to Fiona, who was now frowning.

He forced out a weak chuckle. "Sorry, I was lost in thought."

She didn't look convinced.

"Hmm, you are fairly paler than usual," she observed. "It does not seem as if you were merely lost in thought. Is aught amiss?"

Mikoto shook his head.

"I-it's nothing." His voice did not sound convincing.

But before she could press further, he quickly forced the conversation in another direction.

"A-anyway, so you and Emil. How did the two of you meet?"

There was a brief pause.

Fiona tilted her head, clearly not buying it, but ultimately sighed.

"Well, if you say so."

There was skepticism in her voice, but she let it slide. After all, once her curiosity about him was satisfied, the two of them would probably never see each other again.

"But if you're curious about how I met that old fool, then I suppose I could enlighten you." She cleared her throat, straightening her posture.

Mikoto shifted slightly, eyes flicking to the ceiling, already bracing himself for whatever self-indulgent monologue Fiona was about to deliver.

"As I told you previously, I am the daughter of the renowned Duke Arthur Von Achenbach."

Her tone carried the distinct weight of importance, as if simply uttering her father's name should cause Mikoto to gasp in awe. It didn't.

"My father, for lack of better words, was always an overprotective fool," she continued, tossing her long, silky hair over her shoulder. "He bid me to learn all I could about both magic and martial arts."

Mikoto, who had been staring at a particularly interesting knot in the wooden ceiling, felt his interest pique ever so slightly.

Magic.

Now they were getting somewhere.

Before all this madness, before waking up in a completely different world with a completely different body, Mikoto would have laughed in someone's face if they told him magic was real. He'd just assume they were a chuuni.

But now?

Now, magic was a very real thing—something he had to acknowledge, even if his brain wanted to reject it.

"He wanted me to be able to protect myself if the need arises," Fiona went on, pride creeping into her voice.

Mikoto nodded absentmindedly, still caught up in his own thoughts. Magic... If magic was real, then maybe—just maybe—it could be the key to figuring out how the hell to get home.

"I heeded his wishes and even landed myself at Luminare Academy of Arcane Arts."

Fiona's voice was positively dripping with smugness now, her wolf-like ears twitching ever so slightly in what could only be described as barely contained arrogance.

"This is all very interesting, Fiona-san, but—"

"Hush, hush, I'm getting there."

She cut him off instantly, waving a delicate hand in the air as if shooing away a minor inconvenience. Mikoto huffed through his nose but let her continue.

"I am currently on leave from the academy, as I just finished my last year. And I was even recommended as a teacher's assistant when the new year begins."

Another dramatic hair flip. Another smug expression.

Mikoto rubbed his temples.

("Oh, great. She's a walking, talking anime trope.")

"But you see," she pressed on, oblivious to his growing exasperation, "I wanted to prepare myself properly. So I set off on a journey without my father's permission."

And there it is.

Mikoto could already see where this was going.

"But... I may have neglected to... take the necessary funds."

Her voice lowered ever so slightly at that last part, and Mikoto felt his eye twitch.

"...Let me get this straight," he said, leaning forward slightly. "You, a noblewoman, ran away from home—without telling anyone—without bringing money?"

Fiona, ever the proud noble, immediately cleared her throat and sat up straighter, as if sheer posture could erase the sheer level of irresponsibility she had just admitted to.

"Well," she said, voice perfectly even, "I had thought my skills alone would suffice in providing for myself."

Mikoto stared.

Fiona stared back.

A beat of silence passed.

"...So you were broke."

A muscle twitched in Fiona's jaw.

"Temporarily low on funds," she corrected.

Mikoto snorted.

She ignored him.

"On my journey, I came across an old fool. He was in need of someone to guard his pitiful life and wares, so I bid him to hire me. Though such work is beneath me, I desperately needed the funds. So there, that is how I met that old fool."

Mikoto blinked.

"...That's it?"

Fiona crossed her arms. "Yes."

"That whole drawn-out speech... for that?"

Her eyes narrowed. "You might be wondering for what purpose I told you so much, no?"

"Yup."

"Well, you see," she said, as if explaining something to a particularly slow child, "I wish to establish a connection with you. And I have learned that the best way to go about that is to get to know each other better."

Mikoto eyed her warily.

"...I see. But why?"

Fiona sighed, shaking her head slightly.

"I will not beat around the bush. I'm not one of those scheming noble girls."

She said that as if it was supposed to be reassuring, but all Mikoto could think was:

That's exactly what a scheming noble girl would say.

"You see, your position as a spawn of the Goddess Octavia is not a small matter," she continued. "Your existence as a whole is valuable."

(" Again with this Octavia nonsense.")

Mikoto inhaled deeply, forcing himself to think.

Come on. Let's think for a sec.

("You read tons of bullshit isekai, Mikoto. None of this should be shocking.")

But it is—because it's reality.

"Continue," he said finally.

Fiona nodded.

"Since you're a foreigner and severely lacking in knowledge, I shall enlighten you."

She took a moment, adjusting her posture as if preparing for a grand lecture.

"The Gods and Goddesses possess spawns—people they deem worthy of their blessing. Few are worthy of them."

"So I'm guessing I was blessed by this Goddess, Octavia?" Mikoto asked, raising an eyebrow. "Is that why I look like this?"

"Correct. Our history tells us that the Goddess was a beauty with skin as white as snow and a mane of hair of equal color. And then there were her contrasting eyes, which shone like a million brilliant rubies." Her voice had shifted—suddenly more reverent, almost practiced, as if she were reciting scripture.

Mikoto sighed, rubbing the back of his head.

"Though," Fiona added, tilting her head slightly, "as I said, it is almost unheard of for a male to receive her blessing. But are you sure you're—"

"Yes, I'm sure. You want proof?"

Without hesitation, Mikoto reached for his pants.

"Wait, wait! There's no need for that!"

Fiona practically lunged forward, hands flying up in full-blown panic as her face lit up like a damn lantern.

Mikoto smirked.

"Relax, relax. Just making a point."

Fiona cleared her throat violently, ears twitching with clear irritation.

"S-so you see," she said, visibly struggling to regain composure, "these spawns of the Gods excel in certain talents depending on their deity. In your case, the Goddess Octavia governs over war, magic, and navigation. I'm sure you've already noticed that you're stronger than any normal person. Faster, more agile. And then there's Familial Arts, abilities unique to spawns. It allows a certain imitation of the Gods power via magic but exceptional spawns can use the pure force of their Gods power."

Mikoto hummed.

Magic, huh?

"Fiona-san, can you teach me more about magic?"

Fiona blinked. Then smirked.

"I suppose I could. It would be interesting to see how another spawn of Octavia gets nurtured."

Tonight was going to be a very, very long night.

Magic was a deceptively simple concept. It existed in countless forms, served endless purposes, and varied dramatically in power and execution. Some wielded it as an art, others as a science, and for a rare few, it was as natural as breathing.

But how did it function? How did a person mold the intangible into something tangible?

Envision water. How would you create water from nothing? The fundamental laws of the world dictated that one could not simply will it into existence. Even in a realm governed by magic, something could not be made from nothing.

This is where mana came in.

Mana was omnipresent. It flowed through every corner of existence—suffusing the land, the air, the fabric of the universe. It slumbered within the roots of trees, moved in the blood of beasts, and sat within the hearts of humans and demi-humans alike. It was, in essence, the lifeblood of the world, an invisible force waiting to be shaped, controlled, and given purpose.

However, possession of mana alone did not grant mastery over it. The key distinction lay in how much a person could draw from their internal well. In simple terms, every individual possessed an ever-replenishing reservoir of mana—but the volume they could extract at any given moment varied immensely.

A Simple Example:

Imagine two individuals, Person A and Person B.

Person A could access and wield 80% of their mana reserve. Person B could only tap into 10% of theirs.

While both possessed a finite supply, Person A would appear vastly superior simply because they could harness more of it. In this way, magic was not merely about quantity—it was about efficiency.

Some prodigies could draw 100%, 200%, or even exponentially higher percentages, breaking past ordinary limits and commanding unfathomable power. The greatest magic wielders in history had reached beyond human comprehension, tapping into mana at levels measured not in mere percentages but in billions of times the normal limit.

And yet, raw power alone did not define a sorcerer.

Every single person had a unique mana signature, an invisible fingerprint in their very soul. It was exceedingly rare for two individuals to share identical mana patterns. This distinction made mana not only a source of energy but a deeply personal aspect of one's existence. Though the exceptions were spawns.

Which brought them back to the original question:

How does one create water with magic?

There was no singular answer. No fixed formula. No universal incantation.

Magic was deeply individualistic—each wielder had their own method, their own interpretation, their own unique approach to bending reality.

Some relied on imagination.

A sorcerer might close their eyes and envision the flowing serenity of a river, the crisp coolness of a mountain spring, the crash of ocean waves. By imprinting that vivid mental image upon the world and channeling mana accordingly, they could manifest the concept of water—not ordinary liquid, but an idea given form through magic.

Others approached the process scientifically, breaking down the composition of water to its most fundamental elements and assembling it through sheer precision.

For Mikoto, it was the latter.

His mind worked differently. His thought process did not stem from instinct or fantasy—it was built upon logic and understanding.

("Molecules need to bond. Water molecules have two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. It's a simple process of constructing the necessary atoms and fusing them. With mana as the medium, I can manipulate those elements freely. Then, voilà.")

A sphere of shimmering water hovered above Mikoto's outstretched palm, no larger than a basketball. It rotated gently in place, reflecting the dim candlelight. The liquid was not ordinary—its movement was too precise, its shape too perfect. This was not natural water; it was magic given form.

Fiona, seated across from him, narrowed her eyes, the slightest furrow of her brow betraying her disbelief.

"That was... a lot faster than I expected," she muttered, arms crossing as she examined the flawless construct in his hand. "And not even a glyph? You just willed it into existence?"

She wasn't even masking her skepticism at this point. No glyph. No incantation. No traditional focusing mechanism. He had skipped over all the conventional steps and directly shaped mana into an advanced construct.

That was not normal.

("Suppose that is a spawn of Octavia for you.") Fiona mused internally, watching Mikoto's blank yet oddly entranced expression. ("I only taught him the basics, and he's already conjuring an elemental construct without any formal structure. Most impressive... however.")

Her eyes sharpened as she observed him more closely.

Something was... off.

"I can't feel your mana," she murmured, more to herself than to him.

Mikoto, however, did not hear her.

He was completely immersed in the sensation of power.

For the first time in his life, he felt strong. Not just in a metaphorical sense, but genuinely powerful.

He had just created water with a thought.

If he could do this... what else could he accomplish?

What limits did he have?

How far could he push this power?

How much more could he take?

How—

"Say, Mikoto, how old are you?" Fiona's voice suddenly cut through his spiraling thoughts.

"Fifteen. Why?"

The sphere of water in his palm trembled slightly—then began to shrink, condensing in on itself until it all but erased itself from existence.

Fiona tilted her head, her expression unreadable.

"Hmm... A year off from the 'phase'." She mused aloud, tapping her chin.

Mikoto blinked.

"The what now?"

"It's nothing. Do not worry."

"Right..."

That was not a convincing dismissal.

And judging from the small, knowing smirk tugging at the corners of her lips, she knew it wasn't convincing either.

"Well, on with the lesson, I suppose," she said with an almost too casual air, shifting in her seat as if they hadn't just glossed over a very suspicious topic.

Mikoto eyed her warily.

"You sure? It's getting kinda late." He glanced toward the window, where the once-vibrant twilight had long since faded into the pitch-black veil of night.

Fiona simply smiled.

A very unsettling smile.

"We have all the time in the world, Mikoto."

There was something about the way she said that that made him uneasy.

His gut told him tonight was going to be a very long night.

Chapter 5: Chapter 3: Journey to the capital

Mikoto lay sprawled across the unfamiliar bed, staring blankly at the wooden ceiling above him. His chest rose and fell in slow, measured breaths, but inside, he felt like he was suffocating under the weight of everything. No matter how many times he tried to close his eyes, sleep refused to come. His body felt drained, his limbs heavier than lead, but his mind—his mind was a mess.

This whole situation was absurd. That was the only word for it.

There were plenty of people who dreamed of this exact scenario—waking up in a fantasy world, wielding powerful magic, being blessed by a literal Goddess. Countless books, games, and stories thrived on this concept. A fresh start, a world of endless adventure, a place where one could carve out their own legend.

But for him?

It was a prison.

The thought dug into him like a barbed wire, wrapping itself around his ribs and squeezing until it hurt to breathe. A world of endless possibilities meant nothing when the one thing he wanted most—to go home—was uncertain, distant, maybe even impossible.

His fingers twitched, and without thinking, he raised his right hand. With barely a whisper of thought, a spark ignited in his palm. A delicate fire, flickering in the darkness, casting a faint orange glow over his tired face.

Magic.

It was effortless. Almost too effortless. The warmth of the flame licked against his skin, but it did not burn. With another idle thought, the ember expanded, morphing into a tiny ball of flame. If he willed it, he could grow it, shape it, mold it into something powerful. He had control over fire itself.

It should have thrilled him.

It didn't.

("It's too easy...")

The ember flickered. A second later, he crushed it, the fire vanishing as quickly as it had come. His hand lowered back onto the mattress, the ghostly warmth still lingering against his palm.

("With this power... with the blessing of a Goddess... surely, there's a way.")

Surely, magic—this vast, limitless force—could bridge the gap between worlds. Surely, there existed a spell, an incantation, something that could take him back. The Gods themselves were real, weren't they? If a being could pull him here, then there had to be a way to reverse it.

There had to be.

Because if there wasn't...

Mikoto swallowed hard, pushing that thought away before it could dig itself too deep.

With a slow exhale, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. The screen's sudden brightness stung his tired eyes, but he ignored it as he swiped to his gallery.

And there she was.

Hinata.

His breath hitched slightly as his eyes lingered on the photo.

His little sister stood beside him, her face adorned with a wide, beaming smile—one of those annoying, toothy grins she always made when she was being a brat. Her long black hair, a perfect match to his, fell over her shoulders, her bangs slightly messy, just as they always were. Her sharp grey eyes mirrored his in the picture.

Mikoto couldn't stop the small chuckle that escaped him, though it was hollow. God, she was annoying. She always found new ways to get under his skin, whether it was stealing his snacks, taking his phone to spam stupid pictures, or teasing him about how he never had a girlfriend. She was unbearable.

But she was his unbearable little sister.

And she was gone.

His grip on the phone tightened as a familiar ache spread through his chest. It was like something was gnawing at his insides, eating away at him bit by bit. Would she be okay? She was strong-willed, annoyingly so, but she had always relied on him, whether she admitted it or not. Did she miss him? Was she looking for him?

Or had she already... moved on?

Mikoto quickly locked the screen and shoved the phone back into his pocket. He couldn't think about that. He wouldn't.

But even as he shut his eyes and tried to push those thoughts away, the loneliness clawed at him.

This wasn't home.

And no matter how many nights he spent here, no matter how much magic he learned, it never would be.

"You cannot sleep?"

The sudden voice nearly made Mikoto jump. His heart lurched in his chest as he turned his head toward the source.

There, sitting upright in her bed, was Fiona.

Her usually immaculate hair was a mess, her bangs slightly disheveled, giving her an uncharacteristically soft appearance. She let out a yawn, rubbing her eyes lazily before peering at him through the dim moonlight.

Mikoto let out a breath, placing a hand over his chest. "Damn it, you scared me."

"My apologies. But you were awake, were you not?"

"Yeah... yeah, I was."

Fiona tilted her head slightly, her eyes scanning him. Even half-asleep, she was annoyingly perceptive. "Something troubles you."

Mikoto hesitated. He could tell her the truth. He could tell her that he wasn't some eager young prodigy thrilled by the prospect of magic, that he wasn't excited about being in this world, that all he wanted was to go back to the place he truly belonged.

But he didn't.

Instead, he forced a casual shrug. "Just thinking about magic."

A pause.

Then, to his surprise, Fiona smiled.

"Magic, huh? A worthy topic to dwell on, I suppose." She ran a hand through her hair, smoothing out the tangles. "Tell me, Mikoto. What are your plans from here on out?"

"My plans?"

She nodded. "Indeed. Now that you have awakened to your abilities, what will you do with them?"

Mikoto hesitated for only a moment before answering. "I want to learn as much as I can about magic."

Fiona's smile widened. "Then I have the perfect suggestion."

She leaned forward slightly, her eyes glinting with something dangerous.

"The Luminare Academy of Arcane Arts."

Mikoto blinked. "Academy?"

"It is one of the finest institutions for the study of magic. I am an alumna myself. Considering your age, you would be placed in the first year. Convenient, is it not?"

It made sense. If he wanted to learn more, then attending an academy would be the most logical course of action. But then Fiona added something that made him pause.

"The other spawn of Octavia attends there as well."

Mikoto's brows furrowed. "Wait. You're saying there's another person like me?"

"Indeed."

She studied his expression for a moment before smirking. "I suggest you observe them closely. You might learn something."

Mikoto exhaled sharply. "Great. Homework already."

Fiona chuckled. "I shall also personally tutor you at my manor."

That made him pause. "Wait... you're taking me to your home?"

"Why wouldn't I?" she replied, tilting her head. "I am quite curious about you, Mikoto. And I wish to see your growth firsthand."

Mikoto sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. ("She's helping me just because she's curious? Seriously?")

But in truth, he wouldn't turn down the help.

Because in this world—this foreign world—he needed all the help he could get.

Galadriel, a kingdom that embodied the harmony of diverse peoples, was a land rich with history, culture, and power. Known for its sprawling capital, which stood as the largest of all the great nations, the kingdom commanded an unparalleled presence in the world. Galadriel's size wasn't merely measured by its physical expanse, but by its military might—a force that surpassed all others, stretching across the three great nations with a power that seemed insurmountable.

The very mention of the kingdom's name echoed through the annals of history with the resonance of strength. It was a kingdom of peace, an empire built upon the rubble of past conflicts, yet that peace was not borne from a lack of enemies. No, Galadriel had many—enemies that plotted and schemed from the shadows, jealous of its might, threatened by its prowess. Its many spawns were both a blessing and a curse. Many feared what Galadriel stood for, and most especially, what it contained.

Under the guidance of King Thordan the Seventh, a ruler whose wisdom and strength had become legend, the kingdom flourished. Yet, no king could rid the world of conflict entirely, no matter how great his army. Factions and rulers, distant or close, always found reasons to covet what Galadriel held. What was a mere threat to its defenses, however, was a challenge to the delicate peace that had prevailed for so long. The very presence of spawns—those blessed offspring of the Gods and Goddesses—created unease among other kingdoms, who could not help but see them as symbols of favor, and therefore, power.

Of the many who walked the capital's hallowed streets, few were more revered, or feared, than the spawns of Galadriel. The Gods and Goddesses who had blessed the kingdom with their progeny were not figures of distant myth, but living, breathing legacies. Aragorn, the God of Destruction and Avarice, had his spawn in Galadriel. Legolas, the God of Vigor and Justice, blessed the kingdom with another. Almeric, the God of Knowledge and Alchemy, had his own line among the kingdom's protectors. And then, of course, there was Octavia, the Goddess of War, Magic, and Navigation, whose influence could be felt in every corner of the kingdom.

Yet, even within this nation, conflict simmered. The spawns each carried the traits of their Gods with differing ideologies, ambitions, and burdens. The capital, where the heart of Galadriel's power lay, was a constant flux of diplomacy, rivalry, and more. Though peace reigned above ground, the undercurrents of dissent and power struggles below were just as real.

And in this kingdom of Gods and mortals, Mikoto found himself an unwilling stranger—an outsider.

As he sat at a wooden table, his mind reeled with the enormity of everything he had learned from Fiona. The stew before him, hearty and warm, was a meager distraction from the thoughts that consumed him. His spoon clinked softly against the bowl as he

stirred the beef stew absentmindedly, trying to understand his place in this world that was so foreign.

He glanced up momentarily, his gaze shifting across the empty tables around him. The inn was quiet, save for the soft crackle of the fire in the hearth. Mikoto's brow furrowed as he considered the weight of his new reality. This was a world of magic and Gods, a world that others might envy.

He was blessed by a Goddess, yes, and he wielded power beyond his understanding, but he was still lost. He longed for the simplicity of home, for the faces of his family. He longed for the things that seemed so trivial now—his sister's smile, the quiet hum of his old life. Yet, no matter how he grasped at that fading memory, he could never return.

You belong here now, his thoughts whispered bitterly.

A voice broke his melancholy, pulling him back to the present.

"Hey there, lad, how goes it?" The familiar gruff tone of Emil, the elderly man from yesterday, interrupted Mikoto's spiral. He looked up to find the old man grinning at him from across the table, his eyes twinkling.

"Emil-san, good morning," Mikoto greeted, managing a faint smile.

"So how was your night? I heard you had to share a room with the harpy. My condolences." Emil chuckled warmly, taking a seat opposite Mikoto.

"It was fine," Mikoto replied, forcing the words out. "Fiona-san informed me about some things and suggested I come with her to the capital."

"With you being a spawn, that's probably for the best," Emil remarked, his voice laced with the wisdom of an old man who had seen much of the world.

Mikoto chewed on that thought. The old man's words felt oddly true, but they were still foreign.

"Oh, right, that reminds me," Mikoto said suddenly, his curiosity getting the best of him. "Only a few people in the village seemed to be surprised by my appearance; some didn't seem to point out that I was a spawn."

Emil paused for a moment, the light of understanding dawning in his gaze. "Well, out here in the boonies, most ain't that privy to information on spawns and the Gods and Goddesses." He grinned knowingly. "It would be a different story if you were to go to the capital city. Most folks here were probably just admiring your beauty." His laughter bubbled up but Mikoto could only offer a dry look in return.

("Right. I still look like this...")

"Anyhow, where is that harpy Fiona?" Emil asked, his tone shifting to one of curiosity.

"She—"

"Is right here." Fiona's voice interrupted, cutting through the conversation. She appeared in the doorway, her arms folded, the air around her sharp with annoyance.

"And just when I was having a nice conversation with the lad," Emil sighed, shaking his head.

"Hmph! My business is not with you, old man," Fiona retorted, her sharp gaze flicking toward Mikoto. "I've gathered the needed supplies; we are set to go."

Mikoto quickly finished the last of his stew and stood up. "Alright, I'll be finished in a sec. Well, this is goodbye, Emil-san. Thank you for everything."

The old man waved him off, his grin wide and genuine. "It's nothing, lad. Just glad an old man like me could be of help. Now, you be careful out there."

"Will do, Emil-san." Mikoto gave one last nod before he and Fiona exited the inn.

The morning air was crisp, and the streets were still quiet, save for a few villagers who hurried past, eager to start their day. Mikoto's breath formed small clouds in the cold air as he adjusted his new cloak, still processing everything that had happened in such a short span of time.

"So where are the supplies?" he asked as they walked side by side, his curiosity piqued.

"A simple application of magic," Fiona explained, "I placed them within a dimensional storage. A spell I'll teach you on the way."

Mikoto nodded, intrigued by the concept. Magic was so vast, so limitless, that he felt as though he were only scratching the surface. There was still so much to learn, and so much he did not understand.

"But let us not dilly-dally. Shall we be on our way?"

Mikoto nodded. "Yeah, let's."

"Fīřə." Mikoto watched with interest as a small circular red glyph with intricate patterns came into existence in front of Fiona's outstretched right palm.

Energy and mana seemed to converge and cackle around her palm as suddenly, a bolt of bright orange fire erupted from the end of her conjured glyph, shooting towards the

aimed tree at an alarming speed. The ground seemed to shake beneath their feet as the fireball exploded on impact, engulfing the tree in a bright inferno.

Flames licked at the bark, blackening it as the fire spread through the branches and leaves. Despite being able to do it himself with a little difficulty, Mikoto still watched in awe as the fire raged on, his eyes glued to the inferno before him. The heat was intense, making his skin feel as though it were on fire, but he easily stood his ground, watching patiently as the fire consumed the tree.

Eventually the flames died down, leaving nothing behind but a charred stump. He walked over to where the tree once stood, his eyes surveying the damage. The fire had been powerful, leaving nothing behind but a blackened, lifeless stump.

This was more training as on their journey to the capital they had taken a quick break in the field's.

"What was the glyph for?" Mikoto asked, his voice still carrying a hint of wonder. "And what was with that word you spoke?"

Fiona's lips curled into a slight smile, her eyes gleaming as if she had been waiting for these questions. "Well, I'm glad you asked," she replied, her voice taking on a more instructional tone as she cleared her throat. "You see, these glyphs were invented long ago to help us focus our spells. Mana is a delicate thing—difficult to shape, difficult to control. It's like... trying to hold water in your hands. But glyphs act as a focus, a way to channel and shape that energy more efficiently. They provide structure and guidance to the chaotic flow of magic."

Mikoto nodded slowly, processing the information. The complexity of magic was becoming clearer to him, though it still felt distant, almost intangible.

"But this—" Fiona continued, her voice taking on a haughty edge—"this was just a demonstration. I don't really need to rely on glyphs. I've mastered magic to the point where it's second nature to me." She paused, looking at Mikoto with a raised eyebrow, her expression almost challenging. "Most people would need something like this to control their magic, but me?" She gave a dismissive wave of her hand. "I've transcended the need for such crutches."

Mikoto raised an eyebrow but didn't respond. It wasn't the time for that. He had more pressing questions.

"And the word you spoke?" Mikoto inquired.

Fiona's eyes sparkled as if she were relishing the opportunity to explain. "Ah, now that's where things get interesting," she said, lowering her voice just slightly, as though revealing a secret. "The word I spoke was in the tongue of the Gods—an old, almost forgotten language, rarely used but it's for beginners. Words, you see, hold power."

Power beyond what most people can even comprehend. And when you emphasize certain words—when you speak them with intent—they can amplify your magic. They can alter the fabric of magic, changing the effects of a spell in drastic ways. That firebolt I cast? It was a mere fraction of its potential. By invoking the language, I imbued it with more powerful, transforming a simple fireball into an explosive force that could obliterate a tree in an instant. Though it is quite difficult to use, most use simple incantations."

Mikoto's mind raced, what Fiona had just said sinking in. Words holding that much power... It was something he had never considered. To think that the right words could shape magic—it was a terrifying thought, but one that also sparked a deep curiosity within him.

"I see," Mikoto murmured, his voice distant as he considered everything Fiona had explained. "I think I get it."

Fiona's smile widened in approval. "Good. Now, it's your turn. Time to see what you're capable of." She gestured toward the line of trees in front of them, each one standing tall.

"Right." Mikoto nodded to himself as he stepped forward, taking a deep breath to center his thoughts. His right arm stretched out, palm open and facing the target. He closed his eyes for a moment, feeling the rush of mana coursing through him.

("Carbon dioxide. Water vapor. Oxygen. Nitrogen. Everything I need for combustion.") He visualized each of the elements, picturing them in his mind's eye as he focused on his breathing. His pulse quickened.

When he opened his eyes, he could see the trees in front of him, tall. They stood in a row, blocking his path. The air around him began to distort, the air warping under the force of his magic. The temperature rose rapidly, with sweat beading on his forehead. And then it happened. From the tip of his palm sprang a flame, hot and fierce. It raced towards the trees, and he watched in fascination as it gained speed and power. The moment it touched the first tree, there was an explosion of sound. The force of the firebolt was so strong that it shook the ground beneath his feet. The flames spread, engulfing the tree in a raging blaze. The sound of wood splintering and cracking filled the air as the tree began to fall, the fire still raging around it.

But he wasn't done yet. He had built up so much energy that he had to release it all. He pivoted on his heel, aiming his palm at the next tree. Again, the air around him twisted, and this time he could feel the magic building up within him, filling him with mana.

This time the firebolt was stronger than before, blasting into the tree with the force of a cannon. The trunk groaned and creaked under the onslaught; the bark was blasted into a fine mist, and within moments the tree was reduced to charred, blackened remains, wisps of smoke rising from the aftermath of the powerful spell. He continued, a wild,

exhilarated feeling coursing through him. He moved on to the next tree, feeling as if he could take down anything.

The tree was engulfed almost immediately, the fire racing along the trunk and up into the branches. The sound was almost deafening, the flames licking almost to his feet, and the heat was so intense it would have scorched the hairs on his arms and face if he had any.

He repeated this with the next few trees, each firebolt growing ever stronger and each tree falling in spectacular fashion. By the time he had reached the last tree, he was almost drunk on his own power, his every thought consumed by the magic surging through him.

As he raised his hand for the final time, his heart raced in his chest. He knew that this would be the most powerful firebolt yet. The power was channeled, and the firebolt exploded from his palm in a burst of flame. The final tree stood in the path of the raging fire; its branches and leaves were stripped away almost immediately. The trunk was the last to go, vast chunks of wood falling away into the fire, burning like kindling. The roar of the flames was almost too much to bear; the heat was so intense that it felt like he was standing in an oven.

He laughed as Fiona looked at him with an unreadable expression, but he did not care.

This feeling of **power**...

Was good.