

A Journey Unwanted

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Chapter 24: Chapter 22: The world shall tremble

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In a battle to the death, what is needed in order to win? Strangely enough, that is a question Asmodai was asking himself as his body was flung high into the air like a ragdoll. So as gravity quickly took hold, letting his body fall, he glazed over that particular question.

He spent long years honing himself to perfection. Improving his magical and physical capabilities. Eventually, he was noticed by his superior and granted a place at his side. To reclaim what was once theirs. But barring that, Asmodai saw himself as intelligent.

Someone who could analyze things at a glance and figure out the best outcome. He excelled in all that; he thrived in battle. He enjoyed it, but he found himself asking yet another question.

What matters in the face of overwhelming power?

That question sat at the tip of his mind as the masked boy suddenly appeared in the air above. That eerie grin on the mask almost gleamed as his face was taken by the masked boy with a vice-like grip.

Instantly, the descent that was once slow became fast, bucking the expectations of gravity and defying the laws of nature.

Asmodai's eyes widened as his fall gained considerable speed, causing the world around him to blur in a frenzy. The wind roared in his ears, exerting a powerful force that assaulted his head and cloak, tugging at the fabric of his being.

Under him, the lush green expanse of a dense forest emerged, beckoning. The trees stretched their arms to the sky, their leaves shimmering. Asmodai hurtled toward the canopy, breathless, as the forest embraced him with its earthy fragrance, a tantalizing mix of petrichor, moss, and wild flowers.

Branches brushed and snapped against the fabric of Asmodai's cloak, slowing his descent in a collection of sounds. A symphony of nature enveloped him—a chorus of

chirping crickets, the barks of frightened creatures, and the gentle sway of the forest's denizens disturbed by the sudden intrusion.

Finally, with an explosive spray of leaves and undergrowth, Asmodai's descent was arrested as his body crashed onto the forest floor. The echo of the impact reverberated through the trees, silencing the orchestra of nature momentarily before it resumed its harmonious sound.

Lying among the scattered debris, Asmodai fought against the daze that gripped him. Dirt clung to his clothes, and scratches and bruises adorned his skin like battle scars.

"Apologies." The masked boy spoke, his voice smooth and oddly soothing despite the destruction. Asmodai's vision focused on him, the masked was suddenly standing much further and not a speck of dust on his form despite the violent defiance he initiated.

"See, I'm just curious as to how far I can go with my physical abilities." The boy explained, Asmodai blinked, and suddenly the boy's position changed.

Leisurely leaning against a tree, Mikoto continued.

"See, I always knew I was strong, but never how strong." He started as he stared at Asmodai with those hollow eyes in his mask. "But considering I'm having zero trouble with you, I'm guessing I'm pretty strong." An apparent vein bulged on Asmodai's head as he stood up from the ground, his pride having taken a hit.

"Do not underestimate me. I am not finished yet." Asmodai warned, his glare growing sharper.

Suddenly, a surge of mana roared through the air, and a massive pillar of black fire erupted beneath Mikoto. Flames roared and twisted, reaching towards the skies like the fingers of a damned soul. The heat was palpable, shimmering and distorting the surroundings. Surrounding trees burned away without resistance as the large pillar of fire raged on.

To Asmodai's surprise, as the pillar of darkness raged around him, its heat licking at Mikoto's clothes, not even a single thread began to singe.

Asmodai scowled, a flicker of doubt passed through his eyes, quickly replaced by a raging annoyance. He dismissed the burning pillar with a wave of his hand, a swirling vortex of fire closing into itself, extinguishing the fire.

("He remains untouched"?) Confusion settled in quickly; the demon had not even taken note of any defensive spell being invoked. ("A mere fluke!") He reasoned.

In the absence of the dark flames, a cold chill settled upon the clearing. Asmodai, undeterred by his initial failure, drew upon another wellspring of magical energy. Raising his bony fingers high above his head, he summoned a vast wave of crystalline ice. It

rose, growing in intensity and size until it seemed to blot out the very moon with its freezing presence.

With a swift motion, Asmodai directed the icy torrent towards Mikoto. The wave rushed towards its target, shards of ice spinning and twisting through the air. But as the torrent drew perilously close, Mikoto raised his right hand leisurely as if there was no threat at all.

Suddenly, a surge of power that cracked the air, distorting it with a high-pressure force. Mikoto's fingers moved in a blur, channeling his mana into a single dramatic action. With a gesture of his hand, the intense pressure he generated collided with the approaching wave of ice.

The ice shattered into fragments, falling down like raindrops. The force of the pressure wave turned the ground beneath them into a frenzied tempest of soil and foliage. Trees creaked and groaned as they were uprooted, their trunks splintering under the force.

Mikoto stood unflinching. His clothes remained untouched, devoid of even a speck of ice. His blood-red eyes glinted behind his mask, a gaze that sent shivers down Asmodai's spine.

"Fine then, my turn." Asmodai's body tensed as Mikoto vanished from his position and reappeared before Asmodai in the blink of an eye. The air warped and shimmered around him, with the velocity of his movement.

Before Asmodai could react, Mikoto's fist shot forward, aimed unerringly at his stomach. The impact was cataclysmic, a collision of pure force. Time seemed to slow as Mikoto's fist connected with Asmodai's abdomen. The crack of bone and the rush of air being expelled echoed through the forest.

Asmodai's body contorted, and his features twisted in agony. The punch sent him hurtling through the air with bone-shattering force. The ground beneath him trembled, unable to bear the strain of the impact. Trees snapped like twigs as Asmodai's body plowed through their trunks, leaving a path of destruction in his wake.

As Asmodai soared through the air, a bewildering mix of pain and disorientation consumed him. But before he could come to grip with this newfound flight, Mikoto appeared once again, his lithe figure materializing in an instant. He seized Asmodai by the ankle with a grip fueled by that absurd strength.

With an effortless motion, Mikoto launched Asmodai high into the sky, his body a mere plaything in the palm of the boy's hand. The world span crazily below Asmodai, who could only watch as the ground disappeared beneath him.

Mikoto reappeared once again, now above his disoriented adversary. His fist blazed with power as it hurtled towards Asmodai, descending like a God's retribution. The force

of the blow upon Asmodai's already damaged form was titanic, crashing into him with the accumulated energy of a bomb.

The ground heaved and fractured beneath Asmodai's body, splitting open in gaping ravines. The thunderous shockwave rippled through the air, uprooting trees and showering the surroundings with debris. The ground cratered, leaving a scar on the once serene forest floor.

Slowly, almost gracefully, Asmodai descended back to the ground, his body battered and broken. He lay amidst the pulverized earth, his figure barely recognizable amid the devastation he had wrought.

"Oh, my bad." Mikoto murmured as he gracefully landed on the destroyed ground. "It just occurred to me that I haven't actually used an actual spell." The boy mused as Asmodai's broken form barely managed to stand up.

"What are you!?" The demon demanded, and Mikoto shrugged.

"Just an ordinary boy..." He muttered as his feet slowly left the ground, his body ascending into the air as he stared at Asmodai. "You see, my friend, you get to be the guinea pig for my very own unique spell."

Asmodai slowly backed away as Mikoto smiled beneath his mask.

"I'll show you...the pinnacle of magic."

Asmodai trembled, his weakened body shakily trying to find its footing amidst the wreckage. His blood-red eyes flickered with fear as he slowly pushed back on the shattered ground. Blood oozed from various wounds, staining his dark cloak.

As the boy prepared for his next spell, the forest itself seemed to respond. Enormous circular glyphs began to materialize around Mikoto, expanding and weaving together through the dense area. The air hummed with mana as the mountain sized glyphs flickered with bright luminescence.

Mikoto began to utter his chant, *"Though I shall be thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, this shall be your ultimate defeat!"*

As the final word left his lips, an immense surge of magic erupted from Mikoto, coalescing into an unfathomable pillar of pure light and mana. It shot upward into the sky, tearing at the fabric of reality itself. The forest groaned and creaked under the strain, as if nature itself recognized the cataclysmic power that was being unleashed.

The pillar of destruction pulsed with an intensity that defied comprehension. It bathed the surroundings in a blinding light, eradicating all traces of shadow. The earth trembled beneath the unbearable weight of the spell, collapsing and sinking into an abyss. Trees,

rocks, and even the air itself seemed to dissolve under its withering gaze, the very atoms unraveling.

The pure light destroyed all it touched.

Nothing was spared from this destruction.

The trees, the rivers, the animals even the air.

This attack was meant to kill.

The light beam eventually waned, its incandescent light revealing itself as nothing more than merciless annihilation, the true extent of the devastation became readily apparent. A staggeringly enormous and deep hole gaped in the heart of the forest, a chasm that seemed to defy the laws of nature. Its edges crumbled and disintegrated, casting off sparks and remnants of the destructive spell that had consumed everything in its path.

Amidst the wreckage, Mikoto descended gracefully from the skies, his black hair shimmering in the aftermath of his power.

The forest now stood in ruins, its laws shattered by the devastating spell.

Mikoto whistled, impressed, at the enormous hole his spell left.

"First time I used glyphs and a chant." He hummed as he turned away from the scene of the destruction. Such a large and flashy spell was probably not really necessary, but he wanted to test himself. Mikoto raised a hand to his mask before he removed it. He released a sigh as his form shifted into its original state.

"And that concludes today's experiment!" He stretched his arms as he enjoyed the forest, or what was left of it anyhow. Wearing the mask all day was such a huge pain; precious few were the moments he could actually remove it.

His rosy lips curled into a smirk, "I'm pretty strong, huh?" He gave a smug smile, that looked much too cute to be considered smug. "Damn, I'm so cool."

"Ah shit!" He suddenly cursed. He forgot what his original goal was supposed to be. Slipping his mask back on, he heaved another sigh.

He was just so caught up in the moment that he had forgotten about the wards.

This may prove troublesome.

The Headmaster, the spawn of Octavia, and maybe the Gregory's and the princess. Those were the only true notable threats their Lord warned them of.

Nybbas grinned with an injured Asmodai beneath his arm as he overlooked the large and partially destroyed Luminare Academy.

"Kukuku, I thought there were only a few humans here worth my time, but that masked one." That level of destruction was simply otherworldly; it was immaculate. "And he even managed to do this to dear Asmodai." He murmured as he threw his unconscious demon brethren a glance.

He managed to retrieve him just a split second before that devastating spell was launched.

"Well, it is our loss today, I suppose." Nybbas admitted to no one in particular. All the demons that invaded the academy were put down, and the wards that protected the academy were back up. So they would have to retreat for now, which was a shame. He was rather looking forward to more fun.

"Oh well, there's always next time."

Chapter 25: Chapter 23: Aftermath

[Galadriel]

[Capital City]

It was all the talk around the capital city. The fact that demons had invaded Luminare Academy was a shocking event after all. A prestigious academy such as that actually being successfully invaded. And furthermore it was most shocking that it was demons that were responsible for said invasion.

It was not an exaggeration to say everyone knew what a demon was. Malevolent creatures that spawn from the Abyss. They come in all different shapes and sizes, some more powerful than others or more intelligent than others. Demons were a stain on the world when they invaded, a blight.

Then there were the casualties in the academy—nothing staggering. Twelve dead and sixty injured—something that was going to stain the academy's reputation. Some students were even pulled out of the academy, but the number of students who were pulled out was a negligible amount.

Due to the event of demons having invaded the academy, students were allowed a few days of rest. Some were hauled away within their dorms, some returned to their families, and some chose to visit the capital city.

Mikoto was part of the latter group.

So, walking through the bustling streets with a black dress shirt and pants, he took in the atmosphere. The capital was as lively as he remembered, with diverse groups of people walking the streets and mingling.

Merchants called out for his attention as he passed by, offering goods. He was also drawn towards the different food stalls set up around the square, where vendors were cooking up mouth-watering treats like freshly baked pastries, grilled meats, and sweet pastries. Though he more preferred just eating chocolate. He could go for some.

Of course, he did still receive the occasional gaze due to his mask, but that was neither here nor there. They were merely basking in his awesomeness.

In the midst of all this activity, he caught glimpses of demi-humans and other creatures interspersed among the humans. Some of them were manning their own stalls, selling trinkets or vegetables that they had harvested themselves. Others were wandering around the marketplace, bartering goods or simply enjoying the atmosphere.

("Weird, barring Fiona and that one horned girl, I don't think I've really seen any other people with animal features.") He silently mused as his eyes scanned over a woman with bunny ears atop her head.

Unlike what most would think, there was barely any racism. Though in this world's history there was prejudice and discrimination against certain races, it seemed the people of this world were actually capable of common sense. Things such as demons and Astrothians were clearly a bigger problem than something as benign as breeding conflict over differences.

Of course, there is still a lot of conflict in this world. No wars, though, just fragile relationships between kingdoms. Meaning a war could start at the slightest mishap in one kingdom.

"Hm?" Mikoto ceased his thoughts as he caught a whiff of familiar blonde hair. "Agatha?" The Gregory was situated in front of a stall selling what looked like meat on a skewer. Of course, her not being in the academy meant she was no longer in uniform; instead, she was dressed in a white blouse with a black skirt along with high-thigh boots.

"Tis you." She noted as she threw him a glance.

"Yeah, it's me."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"I am not supposed to speak with you." The blonde suddenly blurted out, and Mikoto could just quirk up an eyebrow at her words, of course it was hidden.

"Why not? I thought we'd be pretty good friends." Well, not really, but he was just trying to make conversation.

"My father told me to avoid interaction with you." She admitted.

"For real?" He questioned, amused. "Lemme guess..." Mikoto cleared his throat loudly as he spoke. "He was all like, 'Listen, here, I don't want you hanging out with that dazzling ruffian who's totally good-looking behind his mask'." He said it in an overly pompous voice.

"Keh-" A small snort escaped the girl as she quickly threw a hand over her mouth.

"Ha, I made you laugh."

"You did not." Agatha quickly denied it with a straight face.

"Uh-huh." Mikoto was not quite convinced of that. "Anyway, what are you doing prancing around? I thought a demon roughed you up." There was a rumor that she and Princess Mirabella had fought a Chaosmaw. And that the two ended up injured by said Chaosmaw.

He wondered if it was the same one he met—the weirdo blue demon. The guy was pretty weak, so maybe not.

"You heard wrong." Agatha stated. "The injuries I have received were nothing but flesh wounds." She clarified.

"Uh-huh. You must be one tough cookie." He noted.

"I am no cookie." She denied it, and he sighed.

"It was a-nevermind." His figures of speech probably did not translate well here. "Anyhow, I heard you and the princess fought together. Got that quality bonding time, huh?"

"What bonding?" She replied with a tilt of her head. "We were merely fighting for our lives."

"Right..." This conversation was going to get very dry quickly, it seemed. "Say I'm meeting up with your brother and a friend at a café later. Wanna come?"

"I refuse." A direct and immediate response from an Agatha, whose face seemed a tad duller now.

"Gotcha, family drama, huh?" That fact was easy enough to deduce or guess.

"It really is not any of your business." She coldly stated.

"Yeah, don't worry, I won't pry or anything like that." He used to have family drama back home, so he could kind of guess how Agatha was feeling, especially concerning a sibling. Hinata used to be jealous of him; she herself was a fuckup, while he always got the highest marks in class and succeeded where she always failed.

That made her more prone to the punishments of their father. And for awhile, she hated him for whatever reason. But eventually that hate turned into just plain hatred for their dear old dad. It probably will not be that easy to solve for the Gregory siblings, but that was neither here nor there.

"Well, I'll be seeing you then." He gave a small wave as he prepared to depart, but he was quickly stopped by her words.

"Thanks..." She spoke in a barely audible whisper, and he just smiled beneath his mask.

"No problem."

[Luminare Academy]

[Conference room]

The room was immense, with high, ceilings decorated with wooden beams

The center of the room was occupied by a massive rectangular table, easily accommodating 30 individuals or more. On either side of the table, high quality chairs stretch the length of the room, inviting attendees to take their seats.

"This meeting is now underway." Professor Gregory announced this as his eyes glazed over the faces of Professor Fergus and Eudora.

"Bah! What damn meeting! There are only three of us here!" Professor Fergus spat out as Professor Eudora heaved a heavy sigh.

"That is because the other professors are currently busy repairing the academy, Alexander." Professor Eudora reminded, annoyance appeared in Professor Fergus's face at being called by his name by a colleague he did not quite like no less.

"Hmph! Then where's that brat, Aleister?" Professor Fergus questioned, Eudora narrowed her eyes at the man for his clear disrespect.

"I bid you to treat your superior with respect, *Alexander*." She advised, the old man just scoffed.

"Hah! Superior? I've known that lad since he was in diapers." He declared with a hearty laugh.

"Enough." Professor Gregory intervened before a full-blown argument could break out between the two. He pinched the bridges of his nose as he heaved a sigh. "We've no time to bicker like small children. While the others are busy with the academy repairs, we must review the situation." He advised.

"Right. Apologies, Professor Gregory." Professor Eudora cleared her throat as she continued. "The wards are the first thing we'll be no doubt discussing, no?" Professor Gregory nodded at her words.

"Those wards were created by Professor Eugene." Professor Gregory started. "There's simply no 'destroying' them."

"Yet these demons seemed to have no problem with that." Professor Fergus hummed.

"They were completely eradicated, the only ones with that kind of power..." Professor Eudora started lowly as Professor Fergus threw her a glance.

"Would be dear Aleister." He finished for her. "Or that damned Harpy."

"Then another spawn of Aragorn?" Professor Eudora suggested not seeming too convinced by that conclusion.

"One working with demons? Mayhap." Professor Gregory murmured.

"Bah! Talk of wards is boring me." Professor Fergus suddenly declared as both Professor Gregory and Eudora sent him dry glances.

"What are you? A child?" Eudora was bemused.

"I'm older than you, brat!" Fergus shot back.

"Enough, on to the Chaosmaw's." Professor Gregory once again quickly interjected.

"From what Miss Lucinda had informed me, there was a second one." Professor Eudora said as Professor Gregory nodded.

"From her report, all he displayed was high mana levels and the use of a high-tier fire spell." Professor Gregory informed, Fergus scoffed.

"That all?"

"Most likely not." Professor Eudora stated: "It was a Chaosmaw; they are not to be trifled with." She warned. "I heard their kind specializes in 'unique magics',"

Gregory hummed, "Indeed, they focus on one aspect they have the most affinity with. Advancing with that affinity to staggering heights, only Chaosmaw's would have unique magic."

"Yeah, yeah." Professor Fergus dismissed him with a wave of his hand as he turned to Professor Gregory. "You fought one, right?" The older man asked as Professor Gregory nodded his head.

"Indeed." He confirmed as he continued. "We only did battle momentarily when he was suddenly teleported away, though no glyphs had been used strangely enough."

"Glyphless teleportation." Professor Eudora hummed. "But I suppose what we're all truly interested in is who was responsible for that explosion that eradicated nearly the whole forest."

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think that Brat Aleister was back." Professor Fergus mused, and for once, the other two professors agreed.

"True, that level of destruction was nothing to scoff at." Professor Gregory murmured.

"But then who could be responsible?" Professor Eudora asked.

"Hell, if I know!" Professor Fergus spat out, and Professor Gregory was at a loss himself.

"Likely candidates would have been either the princess or Lucinda. But the former was injured and unconscious, and the latter would not dream of unleashing such a spell." Professor Gregory stated as Eudora heaved a sigh.

"Well, another problem for the ever-growing pile."

Chapter 26: Chapter 24: Respite

[Galadriel]

[Capital City]

"I'm a bit confused." William admitted as he leaned back in his chair within the confines of the large café, the boy addressing and glancing Ruby's way. The girl was seated next to him, while Mikoto sat across from the two, the masked boy leaning his head against his hand. "So you happened to come across a Chaosmaw and you managed to survive?" William questioned a bit confused.

"Is it that surprising?" Mikoto asked, as the prospect of Ruby having actually survived seemed shocking to the boy.

"Well, my knowledge of demons is not that impressive." He started, taking a short break to take a sip of his tea before placing the cup back on the table. "But from what I understand, Chaosmaw's are insanely powerful."

("That blue guy was throwing around some pretty advanced spells, I guess.") Then, again, compared to him, the blue demon was not anything too troublesome.

"I even heard that even the weakest of them could pose a huge threat." William murmured as a smug look adorned Ruby's face.

"I suppose I am just that good for surviving." The girl boasted.

"Sure." William just wryly smiled at the girl.

"Sure, you didn't just have some help?" Mikoto questioned Ruby as she just furiously shook her head.

"Nuh-uh, I'm just that fantastic. Hence, I survived." She stated it matter-of-factly.

"Riiight." Mikoto was not quite convinced by that. But considering Ruby actually had a pretty refined mana signature, there might actually be some proof for that. She had a decent amount of mana, but what really stood out was just how refined it was. She had perfected control, and by extension, complex spells like curses should be easy for her to use.

"But barring that, have the two of you witnessed that enormous spell that eradicated nearly all of the forest near the academy?" William suddenly asked.

"Yep, what kind of maniac would be capable of such magic?" Ruby asked as she frowned. "I was still in the forest when that spell was unleashed; I nearly got caught up in the explosion."

"Yikes." Mikoto winced; of course, before he unleashed that spell, he had made sure no one was nearby. It seemed he had somehow missed Ruby's mana signature.

("Guess I really should refrain from using destructive spells like that.") He did not even know why he thought it was a good idea to use such a large spell in the first place. That

Chaosmaw was powerful, true, but he could have easily dealt with it without such a flashy spell. Hell, he could have killed it without even making use of any magic.

("Kill?") He really did not think much of it when he unleashed that spell. But he had killed that Chaosmaw, right? He felt as though he should have been a lot more bothered by that fact. Sure, it was a demon and looked so inhumane, but still, it was capable of speech and thought. Like any rational creature.

"But I heard your sister was injured by one Chaosmaw." Ruby spoke, throwing a glance at William. "Is she doing well?" She inquired.

"She's fine; I just couldn't visit her. I think she left the nurse's room." He informed as Mikoto nodded.

"Well, I saw her prancing around the market earlier." Mikoto confirmed.

"Seriously?" William muttered with a sigh. "That girl should be staying in bed."

"She looked fine, actually." Mikoto informed, Agatha did not seem the least bit fatigued or injured. Just her usual self. "I did invite her to come with us to this café, but she refused."

"Yeah, she was never one for social interaction." William looked like he wanted to sigh once again, but he refrained. "But I noticed she seems to talk with you a lot." He murmured after.

"You think so?" Mikoto questioned. Sure, they had talked a few times, but not so much as to be considered a lot.

"Well yeah, Agatha usually is not one to converse a lot. Regardless of who it is." William informed as Mikoto hummed.

"Must be my immaculate riz-charm." Ruby merely looked at Mikoto questionably.

"I fail to spot the charm." The girl stated it in an all-too-blank tone. Though for some reason she winced right after that statement. But Mikoto could only focus on her words.

"Thanks Ruby."

"My pleasure."

"But anyway, I know this is weird to ask..." William started as Mikoto turned his attention back to the blonde to hear him out.

"What is it?"

"Well, I know we've only been acquainted for a few weeks, but I can tell you're a good person." William continued with a smile. "So I was wondering if you could keep an eye on my sister." He heaved a small sigh as he frowned while his brows furrowed. "I would like to do it myself, but as you might have already guessed, Agatha and I are not really on speaking terms." It seemed the hate between the two was only one-sided; William still cared for Agatha, and that much was obvious given how genuine the boy was being.

"This strain in your relationship is no doubt due to Professor Ass hat." Ruby stated, her words gaining a small chuckle out of William, the boy could immediately guess to whom she was referring.

"Yep." William confirmed. He did not really have a problem with telling others, especially if they were friends of his. He might not have known them for long, but he had a good read on Ruby's and Mikoto's personalities. "Well, as you might have heard, I don't possess the blessing of the Goddess Isadora, despite me being a Gregory. I won't bore you with any of the details, but seeing as only Agatha was born as a spawn of Isadora, the pressure was placed on her the most." He explained.

"I'm guessing she wasn't always this recluse then." Mikoto deduced as William nodded his head.

"Yeah, we used to be pretty close when we were younger." His expression grew slightly darker as he continued. "But as soon as her training began, she changed."

"I see, you don't have to explain any further." He imagined it was not fun for the boy to be recalling the past. "And I'll be keeping an eye on her, don't worry."

"Thanks, Mikoto." William exhaled with a smile. "It means a lot, really."

"Yeah, no problem."

"Well, that was nice." Mikoto muttered as he stepped through the lush green grass that stretched as far as the eye could see, dotted with colorful wildflowers. Majestic trees line, ornate stone statues and fountains decorate the area, a beautiful place.

Even the parks in the city was extraordinary.

After parting ways with both Ruby and William, he just decided on a stroll. There was nothing much to do back in his dorm anyway. And he had a lot to ponder about.

("I guess family drama is a thing no matter where you go.") He mused. He was not really going to get involved in whatever problems the Gregory's had. But it was no skin off his back to continue conversing with Agatha.

"But still, is it okay to be this lax?" He thought to himself that he was still no closer to even achieving his goal. He had not even found a way through those wards just yet, and just thinking about how garbage his progression has been was dampening his mood.

"Oh, hush, it's not that bad."

"B-but it really hurts."

"Don't be a baby, Gwendolyn. Tis but a scratch."

Mikoto's thoughts were promptly halted as he turned his attention to the two voices. It was two small girls; one had golden blonde hair that fell to her back and perfectly styled bangs. Furthermore, she had radiant blue eyes and wore a black dress adorned with blue. She was holding the two small hands of another girl. She had dark blue hair and deep, dark blue eyes. And she wore a darker blue dress; both looked around, maybe ten or eleven.

The blonde-haired girl seemed to have a small scratch on her knee, though it was deep enough to draw a small measure of blood. She already had tears forming in her eyes and was sniffing. The blue-haired girl seemed to want to actually comfort her, but just looked stressed.

"Come now, Gwendolyn. You are a noble; nobles do not weep." The blue-haired one informed the now-named Gwendolyn.

("Kids will also still be kids regardless of where you go, huh?") Mikoto mused as he prepared to leave, but he was promptly stopped.

"You there! I command thee to stop!" He heard the squeaky voice of the blue-haired girl. So, turning back to the duo, he quirked up an eyebrow at the two behind his mask.

"Are you talking to me?" He questioned.

"Yes, you. I, Princess Valerie, bid you come." She ordered, and with that introduction given, he supposed she must have been related to Mirabella. What was a princess doing in a park? But shrugging and not really having much to lose, he approached the two. Gwendolyn slightly shrank in fear at his approach.

"Need something?" He asked, and the blue-haired girl just huffed.

"Is that how you start a conversation with a lady?" Valerie questioned with a judging gaze. "You are supposed to introduce yourself first." Mikoto held back a scoff. Was she not the one to call him over? But he supposed he could cut her some slack, seeing as she was just some stupid kid.

"Fine, it's Mikoto." At his short introduction, Valerie quirked up an eyebrow, while Gwendolyn herself looked confused for whatever reason.

"Your name sounds very feminine." Valerie mused.

"I imagine it would; it is unisex." He informed them, and instantly their faces went beet red.

"S-sex!" Gwendolyn shakingly uttered

"Y-you p-pervert!" Valerie accused as Mikoto looked at the two as if they were idiots. "W-why did you say that word!?"

"Oh right, dumb kids and all." Mikoto reminded himself. Valerie looked like she wanted to say something about his comment, but he interrupted her quickly. "Look, kids, clearly you don't know what unisex means, as you seemed to have only heard the latter part and not the former. Basically, the word means something that's both for a girl and a boy." He swiftly exclaimed as the two blinked in confusion.

"I've never heard such a word before." Valerie muttered with a thoughtful look adorning her face, and Gwendolyn seemed to be of the same mind as the blue girl.

"But I feel like we're just getting off track here. You called me here for a reason, no?" Mikoto questioned.

"O-oh right." Valerie blurted out, seemingly slightly embarrassed at having forgotten her goal. "Do you know recovery magic? I wish for you to heal her wound." She said, pointing at Gwendolyn's scrape.

"Could've started with that." He merely murmured as he kneeled down to their level. Hovering his right hand over the scraped knee, a radiating green light came to life on his palm and extended to her knee. In an instant, the small wound immediately closed up, the only thing left being the small amount of blood on her now-healed knee.

"W-wow...." The blonde-haired girl merely muttered out as she moved her leg a little to see if it still hurt to move.

"There, all done." Mikoto murmured as he stood back to his full height. "I'll take chocolate as a reward."

"Satisfactory, I suppose." Valerie uttered this as she examined the wound, completely ignoring his request.

"Ungrateful little-"

"T-thank you!" Gwendolyn's gratitude cut off his words as he threw her a glance. Her slightly jumping at the action, no doubt due to the mask. It really was a troublesome accessory.

"No problem, kid."

"Ah, there you are, princess." A new voice suddenly cut in. Mikoto glanced to the side to take note of a boy that seemed to be only slightly older than him. He had a sculpted face with slightly spiky black hair and piercing blue eyes. He was outfitted in a suit of dark blue armor.

He had an odd aura about him, furthermore Mikoto's instincts were going haywire. Naturally as a spawn of a Goddess of War those instincts should mean much. This guy was freakishly strong, more so than even that Chaosmaw.

Though seeing a masked individual near the princess, he immediately tensed as his eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"Who are you?" He immediately ordered, and Mikoto saw how his legs and arms were ready to spring to action.

"Calm yourself, Lukas." Princess Valerie immediately interjected. "I bid him to heal a wound of Gwendolyn." She quickly clarified but that did not diminish the suspicion in his eyes.

"If you say so, princess." He merely murmured as he kept his eyes on Mikoto. "But we should return to the castle now, princess. Lest your father be worried." Lukas advised.

"What a shame." Valerie seemed dissatisfied with his words, if the pout on her face was any indication.

"You're leaving?" Gwendolyn questioned, a bit of sadness laced in her tone, which made Valerie frown.

"Why must you look like a kicked puppy?" Valerie muttered with a sigh. "We will meet up here tomorrow, okay?"

"O-okay." Gwendolyn merely uttered, still looking down.

"You there. Escort her home." The princess suddenly ordered

"Why?" Mikoto merely questioned, and the princess just looked at him in slight disbelief.

"Because it is what a gentleman would do, you dolt." She informed.

"I'm like fifteen, and are you sure you want strangers escorting your friends?" He merely questioned. Maybe he could just chalk it up to her being a dumb kid, but somehow he doubted that.

"My intuition is strong." She boasted. "I can tell you are not that kind of man. Even if you were, your mana signature is pathetic. Gwendolyn here would have no problem putting you down." She confidently claimed "Now come, Lukas, let us be off. Goodbye, Gwendolyn, until next time." Without another word, she and Lukas walked off, not before he received one last glance from the black-haired boy.

"So..." Mikoto threw a glance at the shuffling blonde. "Shall we be on our way?"

Chapter 27: Chapter 25: Eizenberg Estate

The mansion's exterior was a towering structure, with an imposing presence, and phenomenal architectural details. It had tall stone walls with grandiose windows decorated with stained glass. The entrance was marked by a massive wooden door, carved with what seemed like Astrothians. Lush, well-manicured gardens surround the mansion, turrets rise from different corners, adding to its splendor, while a steep, slate roof with decorative gables completes the appearance.

("About as big as the Achenbach estate") Mikoto mused as he studied the large mansion behind the gates. He had decided to escort Gwendolyn home—not really because the brat princess asked him to, though. It was getting late, and he did not have much to do anyhow.

"So this is your place?" Mikoto asked as he took in the mansion.

"Y-yeah." The blonde girl to his side merely answered shakingly. She was still nervous, no doubt, thanks to the mask. It really did make him look untrustworthy; it was really annoying if he were being honest. Unfortunately, he would just have to live with that annoyance, as removing the mask would cause him more problems.

"But say I've been meaning to ask; you look a lot like a girl named Victoria. You related by any chance?" It has been a question that has been bugging him for awhile now. Gwendolyn looked like a spitting image of Victoria, obviously just smaller.

"You know, sis?" She asked as her expression slightly lit up.

"Yeah, I also happen to attend Luminare Academy." He confirmed. "I talked with your sister a couple of times; she even helped me out with something once."

"Really?" She questioned with admiration in her eyes; she seemed to want to inquire more about his words, but suddenly the large gate before them automatically opened themselves. Once they fully opened themselves, they revealed the mansion beyond, as well as another person approaching them.

It was an old man, he noted, with gray hair and a neatly trimmed beard. He was outfitted in a full butler uniform as well.

("This place has butlers, huh? Unlike Fiona's place.") He noted as the gentleman came to a stop in front of them.

"Mistress Gwendolyn, you've finally returned. Your mother was worried," he said as he gave her a small bow, though before throwing him a suspicious glance. Of course, he expected one.

"S-sorry Alfred. I was busy play-conversing with Princess Valerie," she quickly clarified with a slight stutter.

"I see; your mother will understand, Lady Gwendolyn." He was reassured with a smile before said smile was promptly dropped as soon as he glanced at Mikoto. "But I must ask who your new...erm, friend is?" he questioned, giving him a once-over.

"O-oh! This is Mikoto." She quickly introduced him as she gestured to him. "He helped me in the park earlier, and he goes to Luminare Academy!" She exclaimed the last bit too excitedly.

"Oh, is that so?" The butler murmured. "Well, I am not one to let a good deed go without repayment. Say, sir, would you like to come in for tea?" Alfred asked.

"I wouldn't want to intrude." Mikoto answered.

"Nonsense, you helped Lady Gwendolyn, if her words are to be believed." He stated. "And beside, Lady Annabeth will be most pleased to learn that her daughter has made another friend."

"Alfred.." Gwendolyn seemed to be on the verge of whining, but Mikoto just shrugged. A cup of tea would not hurt.

"Alright then, if you insist." Mikoto said as he received a smile from the older man.

"Brilliant, this way." Alfred gestured for him to follow, and then the three ventured through the mansion courtyard and into the mansion itself. It was as vast and extravagant on the inside.

He was led to a rather large and very extravagant living room.

The living room was decorated with opulent furniture. The walls were decorated with rich wallpaper. Towering bookshelves lined the room and a colossal stone fireplace silently guarded the space, its mantle adorned with decorative weapons and knightly helmets.

"If you would take a seat, I will be with you in a moment." Alfred said as he gestured to one of the plump chairs. Mikoto gave the man a nod before taking a seat. A seemingly less shy Gwendolyn took a seat on a chair across from him as Alfred disappeared off somewhere.

"Pretty extravagant place you got here." Mikoto commented with an impressed whistle.

"Yeah, my father is one of the dukes. Hence the mansion." She clarified. "B-but I wanted to ask you something." She uttered it hesitantly.

"Shoot."

"Uhm....that mask." She briefly contemplated whether she should ask her question, but eventually she managed to steel herself. "Why...why do you wear it?" Of course, her curiosity was always prioritized over the mask she had identified as a magical object. Being a spawn of the God Almeric, like her mother and sister, made it easier to spot such things.

"It's no big deal, really; I just don't like my face. Is all." He answered casually. Of course, there was some truth to his words. He did not, in fact, like this face; it was uncomfortable to think that this was how he looked liked. He would have no problem removing his mask, but he would rather not stare at his own face if possible. It was just eerie; he had his original face for fifteen years, and suddenly it changed. He was grateful for the mask in actuality, if he were being honest. Regardless of the problems it brought,

"O-oh, that is unfortunate." Gwendolyn could only murmur out with a bit of shame in her tone. She felt as though she had touched upon a rather sore subject for the young man.

"Hey, it really isn't that big a deal." He clarified again upon taking note of her expression. "So don't feel bad for asking."

"I-I see." The conversation seemed to be going to die there, despite Gwendolyn clearly wanting to ask something else. However, luckily Alfred showed up, swiftly entering the living room with a silver tray balanced on one hand. On said tray was a pot of tea, along with three cups and a plate of cookies.

He sat the tray on the table in the center of the room before filling each cup with tea. Just as Mikoto was about to question who the third cup was for, said question was immediately answered.

"My, my. It truly is you, Mikoto." He heard a rather familiar voice speak. Turning to the source, he was greeted by a smiling Victoria clad in a regal blue dress adorned with gold. Her beauty as ever would have had most swooning over her, "This is quite the surprise, I admit."

"Sis!" Gwendolyn rather uncharacteristically exclaimed as she all but ran towards her sister. The two briefly embraced each other in a heartwarming hug.

"Tis good to see you, Gwen." Victoria said it with a genuine smile gracing her features. Contrary to the smug and almost condescending smirk that usually sat on her lips,

"I thought you still had business to attend to." Gwendolyn muttered as she let go of her sister. Happiness was practically radiating off of the small girl.

"I thought to wrap up my business so I could see you and mother." Victoria claimed as the two sisters took their seats on the sofas. It was kind of eerie how similar the two looked to each other.

"Nonetheless, it is good to see you, milady." Alfred stated with a bow. "However, your father is absent at this moment. He was to venture to Vel'ryr for some business." He quickly explained, but Victoria merely waved him off.

"I care not of my father; how is my mother?" She questioned as she reached towards the table, taking her cup. She took a brief sip before she sat the cup back on the table.

"She is still rather ill; I fear it has grown worse." He hesitantly admitted it as a frown graced Victoria and Gwendolyn's faces.

"Uh, should I give you guys some privacy?" Mikoto felt as though he should not be hearing all of this. He was just an outsider who was invited for tea; after all, the matter they were going to be discussing seemed quite sensitive.

"Oh, do not worry yourself, Mikoto, dear." Victoria merely said with a small smile. "Let us enjoy this moment of respite."

"Right..."

"So how did the two of you come to meet?" Victoria asked curiously.

"I met her in the park; she injured her knee, and I healed her." He swiftly explained.

"Tsk, tsks, Gwendolyn. What did I say about playing so rough?" Victoria playfully chastised with a smirk directed at a now embarrassed-looking Gwendolyn.

"I wasn't playing rough! Honest!" Gwendolyn quickly defended. "I-I just fell, is all." She mumbled afterwards.

"Come now, Gwendolyn; there's no need for shame. You are still a child." Victoria teased.

"I-I am not a child!" Gwendolyn was quick to deny the fact, but upon noticing how much she had been raising her voice, she shrank as her face burned bright red.

"Oh, it's just a bit of tomfoolery." Victoria stated with a smile at her thoroughly embarrassed sister, who could just glare at her. "But I apologize, Mikoto; we've been neglecting you." Mikoto just waved her words off.

"Eh, don't worry about it. It's nice seeing two sisters bond." Mikoto said, it was a genuinely heartwarming sight.

"Oh? I must say that I am curious as to whether such a mysterious individual as yourself has any siblings." Victoria's words merely elected a raised brow from the masked boy.

"Mysterious?" Mikoto questioned.

"Well, that is how most on campus refer to you, 'the mysterious masked boy'." She quoted with her ever-present smile as Mikoto heaved a sigh.

("How cringe. It will all blow over eventually. Some masked kid will hardly be interesting for long.") He mentally reasoned.

"Ignoring that, I'll just answer your question. I do have a sister back home." He confirmed.

"Oh? What is her name, if I might ask?" Victoria asked, and Mikoto saw no reason to deny her an answer. "

"It's Hinata." He answered.

"I-It's a lovely name." Gwendolyn said as he mouthed her a quiet thanks.

"You hail from the East, correct?" Victoria suddenly asked. Many assumed the same upon hearing his name; of course, he had done his research on what lies further east. There was a country called Doma that was reminiscent of Japanese culture. So it was a simple process of just saying he was from there, just like he was about to do now.

"Yeah, I am." He confirmed.

"Fantastic." Victoria blurted out much of his confusion. "Oh, pardon me, I am just interested in what lies in the east. But this is a conversation that would bore others, I'm afraid." She said, glancing at Gwendolyn and Alfred, who Mikoto forgot was still here. "Alfred, would you mind tending to my mother? And Gwen, why don't you go to your room and play?"

"But I want to talk too!" Gwendolyn protested.

"I'll buy you your favorite treat~" Victoria bargained in a singsong tone.

"R-really?"

"Yep."

"Then it's a deal!" Gwendolyn rather enthusiastically exclaimed as she all but bolted out of the living room, not before giving him a small wave.

"Alfred." Upon his name being uttered by Victoria, the butler merely gave a last small bow before he too existed, swiftly leaving the two on their own.

("Odd.") Mikoto could not help but think. Was privacy to this extent truly necessary? Mikoto felt a strange sense of foreboding as Victoria clasped both her hands together.

"I shall cut to the chase, Mikoto." She started, and her words, of course, immediately confused the boy. "I know it was you who unleashed that spell within the forest."

("Shit")

Chapter 28: Chapter 26: Deal

("Shit.") Unfortunately, that was the first and only word that came to mind upon hearing Victoria's words. Of course, questions also surfaced in his mind. Mainly how? Of course he had not just unleashed that spell, willy-nilly. He, of course, took precautions.

He had altered his mana signature before he launched the spell. It was a simple application of illusion magic. It was potent too—very, very potent. Yet Victoria somehow managed to see through it?

"Dunno what you're talking about." He merely stated after a while.

"Come now, Mikoto, dear. Let us not play coy." Victoria responded with that ever-present and annoying smirk of hers. He was beginning to find it annoying; it was that knowing smirk that just irked him. "You see, Mikoto, your mana signature is very well hidden. But I created a special magical object that would allow me to perceive your mana no matter what. Even if you were to cloak it." She explained as Mikoto frowned.

That was a problem. A very major and troublesome problem. She could see his mana signature; if she could, then she no doubt noticed how eerily similar it was to Lucinda's. Spawns under the same Gods or Goddesses having similar mana signatures, naturally. This whole thing could screw him over. The amount of attention that would be brought to him if it were to be discovered that he was another spawn of Octavia would generate no shortage of problems, problems that interfere with his progress and planning to return.

He suspected them meeting here today was no small coincidence, mayhap it was planned for him to run into Gwendolyn.

"So what if I did?" There is no use hiding it now, but still, what did Victoria hope to gain by disclosing that she knew it was him who unleashed that devastating spell? Maybe blackmail? That little annoying smirk of hers suggested as much.

"Oh? You admitted that rather quickly." She mused.

"Yeah, well there's was no point in hiding it.." There was clearly no point in playing nice or acting polite now. If this girl thought he would just go along with what she had to say just because she happened to know a little secret of his, then she had another thing coming. He would not be anybody's dog. "Tell me what you want."

"What I want?" She questioned, and still that same smirk graced her features. "Oh, but why would you assume I would want anything?" Mikoto just narrowed his eyes at her words.

("Tch, of course she wants something.") He reasoned with a scowl. Her clueless act was not really convincing him in the least.

"I suppose I am curious as to what your face looks like." She murmured as she leaned forward in her chair, her eyes all but sticking into his mask. "Would you mind removing that mask of yours?"

"Not a chance." He immediately answered. He did not really think she would have asked something so benial. Was she actually just curious as to how his face might look? No, that clearly was not the case. He might not have known Victoria for long, but she gave off a certain vibe. With that knowing smile permanently stretched onto her face. She wanted to confirm something; she no doubt saw how similar his mana was to Lucinda's.

"Oh pooh~" She merely pouted at his response, rather uncharacteristically. "I suppose my curiosity about your face will have to remain."

"Quit screwing around, would you?" Mikoto spat. "You brought this whole thing up, so I expect you want something to keep quiet." That much was obvious.

"Why so harsh, Mikoto, dear?" She spoke while fluttering her eyes. "I would not dream of subjecting you to anything unsavory." She clarified.

"That so? But clearly, there is something you want. Otherwise, why bring this up? You'd just be putting a target on your back." He reasoned.

"Say, Mikoto, you are well versed in magic, no?" She suddenly asked, much to his confusion. "Hence, you were able to produce such a mighty spell that was unheard of."

"Guess I'm decent when it comes to magic." He halfheartedly answered.

"I need a truthful and detailed answer, Mikoto, dear." She stated it with the same smile still etched on her face. Mikoto just rolled his eyes as he answered.

"Fine, when it comes to magic, it's like second nature. It doesn't matter which branch of magic—destructive spells, defensive spells, or even healing spells. I excel in each, and hell, I could make my own spells if I ever felt like it. As you've seen with that huge spell back in the forest, It wasn't just some huge ass spell that employed unleashing my mana." He explained swiftly as Victoria hummed in interest.

"Impressive. Most impressive, say Mikoto. Have you ever had a detailed explanation of just how magic functions?" She questioned him as he quirked up a brow beneath his mask.

"My knowledge of magic is pretty basic." He admitted. "I came this far because of my talent, really."

"Then allow me to educate you properly." She started as soon as she cleared her throat.

"Our magic system we explore is a highly intricate method of casting spells through reference. Our system revolves around utilizing specific sources, such as books, scrolls, paintings, or even memories, to tap into the latent energy within them and channel it into powerful magical manifestations. By employing this reference-based approach, spell casters can virtually command the forces of nature and shape reality to their will.

Principles:

The system operates on three fundamental principles: the source, the connection, and the spell.

1. The Source:

A source refers to an object, symbol, or thought imbued with mana and knowledge. It could be ancient grimoires, enchanted artifacts, paintings depicting arcane symbols, or even personal memories that hold potent emotional significance. Each source is unique and contains specific magical properties, providing a reservoir of energy and information that can be accessed.

2. The connection:

The spell-caster establishes a mental and, at times, physical connection between themselves and the chosen source. To initiate a connection, the practitioner needs deep focus and attunement to the source—understanding its purpose and essence. This

connection can be established through touching, reading, visualizing, or even absorbing the source into their own being temporarily.

3. The Spell:

Once the connection is established, the spell caster can draw upon the energy and knowledge stored within the source to cast spells. Spells are composed of intricate rituals, incantations, and hand gestures, which are learned through extensive study and practice. By reciting the appropriate incantation, visualizing the desired outcome, and channeling mana through specific hand movements, the spell-caster can shape and manipulate reality.

Mechanics:

1. Spell Preparation:

Before casting a spell, the practitioner must gather the required source material and perform a ritualistic cleansing to ensure the energy of the source is untainted. This preparation involve purification ceremonies, meditation, or the casting of protective circles to ward off malevolent forces. Though this is mainly for long-term spells and not immediate spells that would just require incantations and glyphs,

2. Reference Utilization:

The spell-caster must have intimate knowledge of the chosen source and its associated magic. For instance, if using a book as a reference, they need to navigate the book's pages to find the intended spell and associated instructions. However, some sources, like memories, require intense concentration to visualize the desired effect accurately.

3. Casting Process:

With the source in hand, the spell caster articulates the spell's incantation, focusing on the desired outcome. They channel personal m, drawing upon the magical reservoir within the source, and direct it with hand movements. Each gesture and word aids in channeling the right kind of mana and gives the spell structure. Of course, those more well versed in the art of magic have no need for this.

4. Spell Execution:

The spell reaches its peak with the spell caster releasing the incantation's final words and combining them with the final gesture. The potential mana stored within the source is released and transformed into the desired magical effect—be it fire conjuration, healing, illusion, or telekinesis. The spell-caster must have a clear intention and focus, as any ambiguity could lead to unpredictable results.

Limitations:

1. Source dependent:

The effectiveness and strength of the spell depend on the quality and potency of the source used. More powerful sources, such as Divine Relics or tomes, yield greater magic potential. It also depends on the user of the spell, as depending on who is unleashing the spell, the effects could vary.

2. Limited Availability:

A spell's potential often corresponds to the rarity and accessibility of the source material. Some sources may be unique or difficult to locate, limiting certain spells' usage.

3. Energy Drain:

Casting spells drains both the energy within the source and the spell caster's personal reserves. Depending on the spell's complexity, the practitioner may require time to recover before casting another spell or need to resort to alternative means of energy replenishment.

Conclusion:

Our magic system revolves around the process of reference-based spell-casting. By harnessing the mana and knowledge within various sources, the spell-caster can manipulate reality through the meticulous execution of rituals, incantations, and gestures. Though they are not needed for an expert sorcerer.

"Huh?" That was all he could utter. Sure, he knew the basics of magic, but still, all of that was a little too much to take in, even for him. And she did not even take a breath while explaining!

"Hahaha!~" And that was her response. She was laughing so uncharacteristically hard that her face nearly burned red. "M-my...hahaha...I dare say I wish I could see the look on your face! Pffft!"

"O-oi! It ain't that funny. Anyone would get confused with that damn info drop!" Mikoto defended.

"Hahaha!~" She just laughed on, it finally subsiding with deep heaves. "Sorry, your clueless response was just too much." She said, taking a deep breath. "Ahem, forgive me, that was rather unbecoming." Yet with those words, she seemed to be still on the verge of laughing.

"Yeah, yeah." Mikoto did not quite enjoy being laughed at. ("But, what the hell is her deal? One minute she's all prim and proper, then the next she's laughing like some

Yanki.") He supposed he could chalk that up to just how unpredictable a woman's mood could be.

"Anyhow, come." She suddenly said as she stood up from her seat. Only momentarily surprised, Mikoto quickly followed after her as she began to move. They exited the living room and stepped onto the vast and extravagant hallways before moving up the expansive stairs.

"Where are you taking me?" He could not help but question as they stopped in front of a room door.

"Patience, Mikoto, dear." She merely uttered out as she knocked on the dark oak door.

"You may enter." He heard the muffled voice of Alfred from beyond the door as Victoria pushed past it, entering a rather spacious room.

The walls were made of aged stone, while towering pillars the lofty ceiling.

A large four-poster bed, draped with rich velvet curtains, dominated the room's center. Upon it lies a woman, frail and delicate, her features pallid and weak. Her golden blonde hair falling down in loose waves, her piercing blue eyes, while bright and captivating, hold a hint of melancholy.

She was dressed in an elegant, yet somewhat faded, old-fashioned blue gown, the color reminiscent of a clear summer sky. The dress was adorned with delicate black lace.

Mikoto found himself focused on the sickly woman. Despite that, however, her beauty was not the least bit diminished.

The sickly yet beautiful woman possesses an ethereal allure that seems to be able to captivate all who enter her presence.

"Oh, Victoria." The woman spoke in a voice that was barely a whisper. Yet it was soothing all the same, and her eyes as they glanced at Victoria held a warmth only a mother could bring forth.

"Mother." That condescending smirk seemed to vanish from Victoria's face as a smile of equal warmth found its way onto her face. "You look well."

"As well as can be." The mother responded back. "Alfred has been much help in offering me much-needed respite."

"Your words are too kind, Mistress Annabeth." Alfred merely stated with a bow. "But I shall leave you lot to converse; merely call for me if you need assistance. Good day." With a final bow, Alfred swiftly made his exit, leaving the three on their own.

"So, Victoria. Who is your friend here?" Annabeth asked curiously as her eyes drifted towards him, and Victoria happily introduced him.

"This is Mikoto; he is going to help heal you." She stated much to both of their confusion.

"Pardon?"

"Huh?"

Chapter 29: Chapter 27: Deal II

[Two years ago]

Victoria watched on as the doctor exited her mother's room. Despite his profession, others might have seen him as young once more it was almost eerie how similar the man looked to her. He was another spawn of the God Almeric, spawns of his usually prosper in professions that could utilize their intelligence so it was not too surprising.

"My mother...how is she?" Victoria found herself immediately asking. To her dread, the doctor heaved a deep sigh as he avoided looking her in the eyes.

"She has the 'Blightscurge'." He stated and her stomach dropped.

"What?" She had heard him clearly, the reality of the situation was just still in the process of settling in.

"I am sure you are well aware of how the 'Blightscurge' functions." The doctor started with a slight pause. "It is a known disease with no known cure. How it functions is that it does consecutive damage to a vital organ. Lungs, livers, hearts stomachs, or even the brain."

"B-but how does my mother have it!?" She questioned, still in denial. "She was fine just a few days ago!"

"I know it might be hard to believe but the 'Blightscurge' is an unpredictable disease we still don't quite understand." The doctor explained. "In your mother's case, it seems to be targeting her lungs. If she follows a schedule where she is periodically healed and given medicine then she has a good few years left. But as you know, there is no cure. I am sorry." The doctor turned and left without another word.

Victoria could only blankly stare on. Her mother was going to die, she was going to die and there was nothing that could be done to prevent that. Victoria absentmindedly walked up to the door of her mother's room. Without knocking she pushed past the door and immediately her eyes fell on the form of her mother resting on the bed.

"Victoria." Her hands were bony and her form frail, her hair was loose and wild, she looked so tired. And even her voice sounded different. Yet a warm smile spread onto her face all the same.

"M-mother..." Victoria looked at the frail form of her mother. She was still denying, that her mother was going to die. Yet the proof was all there and it had already been confirmed. "You-....you're.." She found her words caught up in her throat. She did not know what to say. What could she say?

"De-CoughCough" Whatever her mother was going to say was cut off as coughs violently erupted from her mouth as she threw a frail hand over it.

"Mother!" Victoria rushed to her mother's side as the latter held up a hand to stop her.

"I-it is fine dear.." Her mother managed to say between breaths.

"N-no it's not! You're...." Victoria bit down on her words as her eyes began to sting.

"Victoria..." Despite her pitiful state, her mother's smile persisted. As if saying even such a serious disease would not dampen her. "I may not have long...but you and your sister will always have each other."

"B-but you can't die...Gwen and I....still need you..." Victoria looked down, unable to meet her mother's eyes.

"Oh, Victoria." Her mother embraced her, comfort and safety enveloped Victoria as tears streamed down her face. "With how smart and brilliant you are, I forget you are but a child still."

Maybe it would be a year or two but her mother was going to die an unfair death. She did not want to accept that reality. She wanted to deny it with all her heart, she wanted her mother to live a long and prosperous life. With her and Gwendolyn.

Was that too much to ask?

[Present]

Ridiculous. That word sat at the forefront of his mind as Victoria told her story. Mikoto watched the now blank face of Victoria and the unreadable expression of Annabeth, Victoria's mother.

It was obvious that in exchange for somehow healing Annabeth Victoria would keep quiet.

("C'mon let's see, that fucker wanted me to become a doctor anyway so let's see how good I'd be. Blightscurge is kinda like cancer in a way. But I don't know if tumors are involved. This world's study into anything medical is mediocre, I don't even think they know what bacteria is. In Victoria's mother's case, her lungs seem to be the main problem, so...")

"Persistent cough, shortness of breath, chest pain, wheezing, fatigue, weight loss, loss of appetite, change of voice, recurrent respiratory infections, and bone pain." Victoria and her mother blinked in surprise as he blurted out those symptoms. "Those are some of the things you experienced, Ms. Eizenberg. Correct?"

"How...." Annabeth seemed flabbergasted at how accurate he was being with analyzing her symptoms. "T-that is correct but how?"

("Those are all symptoms for lung cancer, curious.") Reaching his hand to his mask, he removed it just a bit so one of his eyes was visible. Next what he did was simple, he used magic to produce a very concentrated beam of electrons known as X-ray photons. This beam traveled through the air, came into contact with Annabeth's body tissues, and produced an image on a metal film in his mind. There were more steps but he was just using a very simplified method to get the desired results.

("A white-gray mass and it's located at her chest.") Mikoto mused. "You have a malignant tumor on your lungs. You've got cancer it seems, seeing as you began to get sick two years ago. You'll probably die in three years if you continue your routine of healing." Mikoto blankly informed and more confusion became evident between Victoria and her mother.

"I...I do not understand." Victoria admitted. "Tumor? Cancer? I've never heard of these terms."

"Well in simple terms a tumor is a group of abnormal cells that form lumps or growths. They can start in any one of the trillions of cells in our bodies. They behave differently too, depending on whether they are cancerous, non-cancerous, or precancerous."

He explained and for once in her life, Victoria felt confused. It was not often she found herself dumbstruck, she did not understand a single word coming out of Mikoto's mouth.

"Hahaha~." She remained dumbstruck for only a while but quickly snapped out of it as she heard her mother's soft giggle.

"M-mother?" She questioned looking at her seemingly amused daughter.

"Sorry dear, it's not every day I see you this befuddled." She admitted with a smile.

"C-come now, surely you find it absurdly confusing," Victoria argued.

"I do. But still, you look cute when you are confused." Her mother shot back.

"Mother!" She whined. It was actually kind of fun and satisfying seeing this side of Victoria. "E-enough of that." Victoria cleared her throat as she glanced back at Mikoto. "You seem to know much of these things." She did not know what 'these things' entailed but she assumed he was just knowledgeable.

"Well my father was a doctor and he wanted me to follow in his footsteps, so I studied ahead of time to become one." He informed, that as much as a bastard his father was he admitted that information ingrained into his mind was pretty useful. "Anyway onto more important things, your mother here has non-small cell lung cancer. The main subtypes of non-small cell lung cancer are adenocarcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and large cell carcinoma. These subtypes, start from different types of lung cells, and are grouped as non-small lung cancer because their treatment and prognoses are often similar." Mikoto explained without missing a beat.

"Huh?" A rather uncharacteristic response came from Victoria and Mikoto had to hold back a snort. ("He....he's throwing these complex terms around on purpose!")

He was indeed, it was refreshing to see her all confused.

("Seriously, no wonder people keep dying from this 'Blightscurge'. There's no real way to treat it, they just heal the patients and call it a day. And it's cancer, guess some diseases will always be there no matter what.")

"Can you?" He heard Victoria suddenly ask, prompting him to look at her. "Are you able to heal my mother?" She asked as Mikoto hummed.

("Usually those with non-small cell lung cancer can be treated with surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy, or a combination of these treatments. None of those are available, or possible at the moment but....")

"I can."

[Forest]

"How absurd." Lucinda could not help but mutter as she studied the absurdly wide and gaping hole carved in what was once the forest. Now only a small amount of trees circled the whole, this was no forest anymore.

("That spell, at first glance it seems whoever employed it used light magic as a medium or at least just outputted their mana to achieve such devastation. But that spell was neither of the two.") Like many others, she was curious as to who could have unleashed such a devastating spell.

But she was not surprised at the level of destruction, no she was more focused on how someone was able to deploy such a spell. Furthermore, she had never witnessed such a spell before. The clear answer was that someone had created this new spell.

Of course, curiosity was not the only reason she had decided to venture out here. The mana she had sensed when the spell was released was odd, to say the least. Odd as in it was eerily similar to her own. The mana signature she had very briefly detected was covered and protected by layers of illusion magic to alter it.

She had broken through each of those layers and then there was where she had sensed it.

That single mana signature was similar to her own.

("Could it have been another spawn of Octavia?") She questioned herself. It would be absurd, never in the history of the world was there more than two spawns of the Goddess Octavia in the same era. It was due to how rare Octavia's blessing was. There were eras where there were not even any spawns of Octavia.

It is why the blessing was seen as valuable. That and she governs over magic, a concept with endless possibilities. It is why she was such an important aspect of the kingdom of Galadriel. A spawn of Octavia simply held that much value.

It is why a war nearly broke out between Galadriel and the neighboring country of Vel'ryr. All because either side wanted to get their hands on her, a spawn of Octavia.

It is why she was out here. She had to know, she needed to know if there was someone else out there who shared her burden.

"Tch, great there's someone else here." She suddenly heard a voice mutter in annoyance. Followed by that were two sets of footsteps. Turning her head to the side she was surprised to see Princess Mirabella along with a fuzzy gray-haired girl with horns.

"You're the princess..." Lucinda murmured and the blue-haired girl seemed to want to roll her eyes.

"Yeah, it's me, huzzah." She rather sarcastically replied. Lucinda could only sheepishly smile to herself.

("Well I heard rumors that the princess was rather....brash.")

"P-princess, I don't think you should be so rude." The grey-haired horned girl commented from the princess's side, and this time she rolled her eyes.

"I ain't rude, twerp." She shot back without much hostility behind her words. "I was just talking." Juliana merely looked at her as if she did not believe the said statement. Lucinda thought to change the subject quickly lest things get a little awkward.

"Say, what are the two of you doing here?" She questioned, she thought most would stay away given there was a gaping hole in what used to be the forest.

"Looking for the fucker who made this huge ass hole." Mirabella crudely stated, causing Juliana to be flustered at her blatant swearing. "I wanna kick their ass."

"M-Mirabella! You shouldn't speak like that!" Juliana shakingly stated as the aforementioned girl merely shrugged.

"Uhm, why would you want to do that?" Lucinda could not help but question, befuddled.

"This used to be my training spot, but now it's useless," Mirabella answered but a thoughtful look crossed her face as she looked at Juliana. "Say, you're that spawn of Octavia, right?" Mirabella asked as Lucinda nodded. "Great! I heard you were pretty strong. Let's spar?"

"Huh!?"

Chapter 30: Chapter 28: Prep

[Luminare Academy]

In the fleeting moment of waning dusk,

A young lad awaits in verdant stillness,

Beneath nature's gentle ebon canopy,

Clad in whispers of a soft zephyr's caress.

His hazel eyes, alight with curiosity,

Fixate on the ethereal scene taking shape,

A stirring revelation before his very gaze,

Where shadows dance and secrets awake,.

There, beneath the love-kissed moon's tender might,

Stands she, the muse of an enigmatic tale,

Bound by a captivating, fair facade,
A celestial portrait of allure does not fail.
Her cascading tresses, spun of lustrous gleam,
Draped in milky strands of delicate white,
Like moonbeams delicately cast upon earth,
Emanate purity, adorned in lunar light.
Her crimson orbs, portals to an unknown world,
Reflect on the depths of some forbidden realm,
Enchanting, swirling, unfathomable mysteries,
Arousing the boy's curiosity overwhelms him.
A porcelain visage, kissed by moonlit dew,
Adorned with a pallor as pale as untouched snow,
The delicate canvas of a celestial deity,
Whose profound essence he yearns to know.
Silent footfalls, an ethereal dance upon petals ,
Through moonbathed gardens, she gracefully glides.
The air trembles with a secret melody,
Tears of stardust gather in the boy's eyes.
Her every movement, a fluid waltz with grace,
Her gestures an enchantment born of dreams,
Her touch, an ethereal whisper in the wind,
Invoking a tempest of thoughts unforeseen.
Beneath a sky adorned with celestial constellations,

The boy remains transfixed, a mere mortal soul.
Entranced by this otherworldly apparition,
Transcending boundaries, traversing dimensions untold.
How does one encapsulate such resplendent beauty?
A flame of artistry within the boy's chest does rise,
Without words to grasp the essence of her being,
He is lost, entrapped in emotion's labyrinthine guise.
For she, the girl with white hair, red eyes, and pale skin,
Is an enigma that defies tangible description,
A tapestry spun from the silk of celestial secrets,
Breathing life into the boy's fervent transcription.
Thus, as the moon's tender glow begins to wane,
And the morning's golden veil delicately unfurls,
The boy clings to the memory, a phantom embraced.
Of the girl whose beauty transcended earthly bounds.

"A poem?" Mikoto questioned as he stared at the note in his hands. Although he would have liked to comment about how corny it was, he was currently more focused on the section describing someone with white hair, red eyes, and pale skin. It was the first day back in the academy, and things were just progressing slowly and blandly.

He entered his homeroom and approached his desk, where he had found a poem. It was concerning, seeing as it described his appearance in great detail. Fiona knew he was a spawn of Octavia, but she was not the type to write poems like this. And the poem mentioned a boy witnessing this white-haired individual. But maybe he should not take that literary.

Victoria was, of course, another candidate, but he was pretty sure she was not in the academy today. Seeing as her mother was in full health, she was spending every waking moment with her. Had someone figured out his secret?

There were not many instances where he was without the mask. Then again, this might have ended up on his desk by mistake. Maybe it was really meant for Lucinda.

("It seems a bit far-fetched, but maybe I should take it to her; the writing style might seem familiar to her.")

"Is aught amiss?" He blinked in surprise beneath his mask as he turned to Agatha. She must have taken note on how long he was staring at the note.

"Eh, just a love letter." He mused as he took a seat at his desk. "It's hard being this handsome."

"I see." She did not seem to believe that part, for whatever reason.

"So what have you been up to for the past few days?" He asked as she quirked up an eyebrow at the sudden question.

"Why are you asking?" She questioned, but she did not really seem to mind his asking.

"Why not?" He countered. She looked as though she wanted to roll her eyes, but refrained.

"If you must know, I have been busying myself with training." She answered.

"Cause you got beaten by that Chaosmaw?" Her eyes twitched at his casual bluntness as she begrudgingly answered.

"Yes. My father bid me to never suffer such humiliation again." To her confusion, Mikoto just scoffed.

"Your old man is such an ass hat." Funny enough, she did not seem tempted to refute his claim.

"Heh, I suppose you are right." She mused. It seems she shared her distaste for her father with William.

"Course I am." Mikoto stated with a hidden smirk, he opened his mouth to speak but quickly stopped himself when someone entered the classroom with heavy steps. The classroom was immediately silenced, and Mikoto thought Professor Gregory was already here.

"Alright, listen up, maggots!" The booming voice of Professor Fergus traveled through the classroom. Not even murmuring remained, but it was clear that everyone was confused as to why Professor Gregory was not here, and instead it was Professor Fergus. "I hope you brats haven't been getting lazy because there's work to do!" He announced only further confusing everyone.

Though confusion was soon turned into shock when the entire classroom was lit up by a large glyph suddenly forming in the room, in the next instance, everyone's rear suddenly planted on grassy ground as their view of the large classroom was replaced with a lush forest.

Mikoto, who was fortunate enough to land on his feet after the sudden teleportation, frowned beneath his mask. Professor Fergus did not strike him as the type of person who was capable of mass teleportation without even a chant. But for now, he threw that fact at the back of his mind. He wanted to focus on the poem from earlier, but it seems that would have to wait.

But now it was time for him to take note of the forest. The one closest to the academy was destroyed by him. But the mana that engulfed this area was reminiscent of that very same forest. Magic particles were easy to detect as they were everywhere, and some things had a distinct signature.

"This forest, it's..." He murmured lowly as Professor Fergus spoke up once more.

"That's right, brat, the forest has been repaired." The old man stated much of everyone's confusion.

"Repaired?"

"What is he talking about?"

"It was completely eradicated, though."

"Yeah, there is no just 'repairing' it. That is just absurd."

Everyone let their confusion be known, but Professor Fergus did not seem the least bit keen on explaining to the class how the forest that was eradicated was suddenly whole once more. He also did not seem keen on explaining why he was here instead of their class teacher, Professor Gregory.

"Work of other Gregory's." He suddenly heard Agatha to his side inform.

"Seriously? Gregory's are powerful enough to just repair an entire destroyed forest?" Mikoto questioned as Agatha shook her head.

"No, but there was likely more than one. It no doubt was thanks to combined effort." She clarified. "Our family line strives in creation."

"I see, that makes sense." Mikoto murmured thoughtfully.

"Quiet down now, ye brats; it's time for today's lesson!" Professor Fergus announced. "Today is more combat training."

"Hmm, combat training on our first day back?" One student questioned.

"Is that not a bit absurd?" Another questioned.

"You would think professors would be more lenient."

"I won't go and bore you on why it's combat training on your first day back, as I am sure some of you already realized." Professor Fergus started.

("I'm guessing it has to do with the demon invasion. It seems they want their learners to be better prepared in the near future.")

"Maybe they want fresh participants for the festival..." He heard Agatha murmur, much to his confusion.

"Festival?" Mikoto questioned, causing Agatha to turn to him.

"Right, you hail from the East. So you are not privy to customs here." She said, thoughtfully. "A festival is to be held in honor of the Goddess Octavia. Though it is much too early to train for it," She informed.

"Octavia? Why her?" It was the first time he had heard of this supposed festival. And it was odd that Octavia was the centerpiece.

"She is a Goddess of magic, war and navigation, aspects that are ingrained in our world. Many seek to honor her; however, this festival was created by her. Usually kingdoms in the West participate in the festival, seeing as the Goddess Octavia is one of the diverse gods." She explained.

"Whole kingdoms? I thought Octavia was a Goddess only worshipped in Galadriel." Though he never really looked much into anything truly religious,.

"Nay, many Gods are worshipped over the world." She clarified as he hummed in interest. "Though Octavia herself shall apparently award the victors."

He wanted to ask more about the festival, but Professor Fergus spoke up once more.

"Now, what you lot will be doing for this test is simple, so I won't be repeating myself. So make sure you brats listen." Professor Fergus started. "It'll be a good ol' fashioned last man standing match. Though you'll be going in teams of two, you brats get to choose your partners. Now be quick about it!" After that small information dropped, murmuring within the classroom population immediately broke out. Some were confused, while others were more focused on already establishing their small teams.

Mikoto's eyes scanned over the faces of his class, and they came to a stop at the two familiar faces of William and Ruby. The former of which was giving him a sheepish look,

Mikoto threw him a thumbs up. Just so he did not feel bad for leaving Mikoto out. The boy gave him a nod as he turned back to Agatha.

"So wanna team up?" He asked the girl as she sent him a questioning gaze.

"I am better off alone." She merely murmured.

"Uh-huh. You sure? I'm pretty strong." He stated.

"Stronger than most in this class?" She asked with a raised brow.

"Stronger than you." He boldly proclaimed.

"Is that so?" She trailed off with her eyes narrowing. "Care to put that to the test?" She challenged surprisingly enough.

"Oh, how bold, Agatha. Eh, maybe after this whole thing."

"Deal."

The whole training exercise was rather simple. Like Professor Fergus said, it was a simple elimination game. Students were merely put against each other; of course, maiming was not aloud or killing. Currently, Mikoto was battling two of his fellow classmates. A girl and a boy, respectively.

The girl, who had long chestnut hair falling down her back in waves, focused her gaze on Mikoto. Raising her right hand,, she extended her fingers, forming a precise position as if tracing an invisible symbol. Mana coalesced in front of her palm, gathering into a circular glyph that glowed with light. Its patterns shimmered; from the glyph, Mikoto could easily tell it was a wind spell.

The girl began to chant, her voice echoing like a harmony, as the chant reached its climax, the girl thrust her hand forward, directing her mana through the glyph. Suddenly, an exquisitely crafted wind blade materialized. With incredible speed, it hurtled towards Mikoto.

Mikoto watched the blade of wind race towards him; it might have seemed to come towards him with insane speed, but in his view, it was coming at a snail's pace. So he merely stepped to the side as the blade of wind whizzed past him, striking a tree.

Undeterred by the failed strike, the boy standing beside the girl seized his chance. A quizzical expression flashed across his face. He mimicked the girl's previous gesture. A glyph of fire formed in front of his palm, brimming with searing heat.

Without hesitation, the boy unleashed a spell of his own, summoning a bolt of pure fire. The flames flickered, trailing behind the burning projectile as it surged toward the lone figure. Yet, to their surprise, Mikoto raised his hand, his movement almost disdainful, and with a swift swipe of his slender fingers, the fire bolt met an abrupt end, vanishing into thin air.

The girl and her companion exchanged a quick glance, a silent communication passing between them. They were, of course, absolutely perplexed; Mikoto had just swiped away a bolt of fire with no effort after all. Though Mikoto was not going to let the absurdity of the situation fully sink in.

As the two readied themselves for the next move, their attention fixed on Mikoto, and a sudden distortion in the air caught their eyes. In the blink of an eye, Mikoto, fueled by an invisible force, vanished from his previous position as if swallowed by intangible shadows. Astonishment, tinged with apprehension, washed over the faces of the girl and the boy as they tried to comprehend the impossible speed at which he moved.

He reappeared in a blur, his lithe form now positioned between the girl and the boy. In this fleeting moment, time seemed to hang suspended.

Without wasting another precious instant, Mikoto propelled himself forward with lightning speed; his fist propelled like a guided missile towards the girl's abdomen. The force behind his strike reverberated through the air, the sound of impact mingling with the gasp that escaped the girl's lips. The sickening thud resonated as her body crumpled under the devastating blow, her breath stolen from her chest in a rush.

Simultaneously, Mikoto's attention shifted seamlessly to his other target—the companion who stood frozen, eyes widening in disbelief. Before he had a chance to react, Mikoto lunged forward, his hand arcing through the air. A swift, merciless chop found its mark on the vulnerable juncture of the boy's neck, an onslaught of pain and disorientation spreading through his body like a vicious shockwave.

The force of the blow sent ripples of dizziness and blackness crashing into the boy's consciousness. His legs wobbled unsteadily, the strength leaving them like water draining from a broken vessel. In an instant, his vision blurred, his world swaying dangerously as his body, unable to withstand the assault, sank to the ground in a crumpled heap.

"There, easy as pie." Mikoto commented as he turned away from the unconscious two. "Now where did Agatha run off to?"