

A Journey Unwanted

Chapter 6: Chapter 4: Capital City

[Galadriel]

[Capital City]

The capital city, Galadriel, loomed like a monument to human ingenuity, standing tall, and proud. As Mikoto stood there, his identity hidden within a cloak, his mouth agape, the vastness of it all hit him like a wave—his eyes tracing every detail, from the carvings of the grand walls to the flowing banners of color that decorated every corner. The city stretched out before him like a never-ending ocean of stone and life, its buildings rising high, made from stone and fired brick.

The city was bound within towering white stone walls, their surface adorned with ornate engravings that twisted into strange symbols and elegant shapes. The stone had been sculpted with care. Guard towers stood proudly atop these walls, each manned by soldiers clad in gleaming armor, a lion emblem on their chest, their spears raised high.

The grand entrance to the city was a gateway alive with constant movement, a sea of people. Farmers shuffled past, their carts laden with fresh produce, the smell of ripe fruits and vegetables mingling with an earthy aroma. Bakers, their aprons flour-streaked, called out to passersby, offering warm loaves of bread. Traders haggled over prices, their voices rising and falling in a collection of accents and languages as they exchanged wares—spices from distant lands, rich fabrics dyed in vivid hues, and strange trinkets that caught the eye. The air was thick with the cloying scent of exotic spices—saffron, cumin, cinnamon—each one promising a taste of something far away, a promise of flavors Mikoto had never dreamed of before.

As Mikoto followed Fiona through the streets, his red eyes absorbed every detail, his gaze flitting from the wrought iron lampposts that lined the road to the vibrant stalls overflowing with goods. It felt like stepping into a dream, one of those fantastical stories, where everything was larger than life and impossible to comprehend. The streets twisted and turned, like a maze. Yet, despite the complexity, there was a method to it all—a flow, an organized chaos that kept the city running smoothly. People moved with purpose, never bumping into one another, their steps guided by something more. The sounds of laughter, music, and the occasional shout of a street vendor rose above the normal hum.

It was then that Mikoto saw the marketplace in the distance, and his breath caught in his throat. The central hub, it was a hive of activity, more alive than any place he had ever encountered. There, color exploded from every corner: red and gold tents flapping in the wind, merchants waving their hands frantically to grab attention, entertainers twirling

and dancing as if they could bring the air to life. The streets themselves were lined with stalls selling trinkets, potions, and magical items from distant lands—some glowing faintly, others pulsating with strange mana.

As he moved deeper into the city, the buildings grew grander, more awe-inspiring. Cathedrals that seemed to touch the skies rose majestically on either side, their stained-glass windows casting colorful reflections onto the streets below. The castles and mansions of the wealthy stretched across the horizon. The people that passed by were dressed in the finest attire, decorated with jewels that sparkled like stars.

And as they passed through the streets, Fiona's chuckle cut through the air, snapping Mikoto out of his thoughts. "Come now, there's no need for such a flabbergasted expression, Mikoto." She grinned.

Mikoto, still in awe, adjusted his hood and muttered, "Sorry, I just... this is all amazing."

"Well, the capital city is amazing, I suppose," she replied, her tone softening. "And you are an outsider, so it must be overwhelming. But come, there is much more to see."

Mikoto raised an eyebrow, still unsure of what exactly they were supposed to be doing. "We're not going to your place?"

Fiona's grin only widened as she gave him a side glance. "Not immediately. I thought you might want to see what Galadriel has to offer. You can't just hole up in my home right away."

Mikoto frowned slightly. "Is it wise to walk around like this? I don't want to attract attention..."

"Do not worry. We will sample some of the finest cuisine, and then we will be on our way," Fiona said confidently, her tone breezy.

"Cuisine?" Mikoto repeated, perplexed.

"Yes, the food stalls here are simply the best! It would be a shame to leave without tasting some of the local dishes." She laughed and then suddenly darted off, leaving Mikoto to stand there against the cobblestone wall, still trying to take in everything around him.

Mikoto sighed as he leaned back against the wall, watching the chaos of the marketplace unfold before him. His red eye traced the faces of the people around him, each one more absurd than the last. It was all so surreal, too surreal. Even after everything—after his strange arrival in this world, after the shock of the city—it was starting to feel real. But was it real? Could this be real? No. He couldn't question it anymore. This was his reality, and there was no turning back now.

As his gaze wandered over the crowd, his thoughts turned inward, to the few people he held dear, to the memories that kept him anchored. He clenched his teeth, feeling that gnawing sense of longing deep within his chest. He had a goal. He had a purpose. But how long would it take? Weeks? Months? Years? Could he endure this unknown stretch of time? No, he didn't have a choice. He had to hold out. He had to.

"Your eyes are very pretty."

The sudden voice jolted Mikoto out of his reverie, and he blinked as he looked down at the source. A small girl stood before him, her aqua-colored hair and eyes gleaming with an odd, dull expression. She was shorter than Mikoto, her gaze fixed on him with an unnerving intensity.

"Thanks..." he muttered, unsure of what to make of her sudden appearance. He could not help but get an eerie feeling from this girl.

"Are you a girl?" she asked, tilting her head in confusion. Mikoto sighed inwardly. His looks—thanks to the Goddess—had caused too much confusion.

"I'm male," Mikoto replied, trying to avoid any further awkwardness.

"Ah, sorry, I'm supposed to introduce myself in situations like this," she said, looking a bit flustered now. "I'm Ruby."

Mikoto raised an eyebrow. "Ironic..." As he shook his head. "Mikoto."

Ruby didn't catch the comment, smiling as she repeated his name, testing it on her tongue. "Mikoto. I like your name. It's cute."

"Thanks a bunch..." Mikoto deadpanned, feeling completely uncomfortable as she smiled even more. The awkward silence stretched, and Mikoto cleared his throat. "Was there a reason you approached me?"

Ruby blinked. "Oh yes, I just thought your eyes were pretty, and I wanted to tell you." Her tone was flat, almost as if she wasn't even aware of how strange her words sounded.

"...I see," Mikoto said, still unsure how to respond. "Well, thanks."

"That's all," she said, waving and smiling again, her movements slow before she turned and vanished into the crowd.

Mikoto stared after her, bewildered. "What a weirdo..."

Fiona, just as abruptly, reappeared, clutching a strange, crispy-looking potato wrapped in paper. "And I have returned!" she announced triumphantly, handing it to Mikoto. "Here's some fine cuisine!"

Mikoto stared at it, unsure whether to laugh or sigh. "Thanks..." he mumbled, taking the offered food.

"So? How is it?" Fiona asked as she took a big bite of her own, clearly enjoying herself.

"Pretty good," Mikoto said, unsure how to rate it.

"Pretty good?" she repeated with a raised brow. "Is that all?"

"Very good," Mikoto amended quickly.

"Well, I think it's delicious," Fiona said with a grin, her mouth still full of food. Mikoto resisted the urge to comment on her lack of table manners.

"Aren't you used to eating things that are better than this?" he asked, knowing full well her status as the daughter of a Duke meant she likely had access to finer food.

"Hmph! As the daughter of a Duke, I must present myself with refinement!" she declared, her tone suddenly haughty. "I rarely get to indulge in food like this, so when I do... I savor every moment."

Mikoto raised an eyebrow as she inhaled the rest of the potato in seconds. "You devoured that in seconds, though."

"The details aren't important," she said with a playful glare.

"Right..."

"Well, come. We'll head to my mansion now. But be warned, my father can be quite... dramatic. Prepare yourself," she added as Mikoto followed, his mind already spinning with the strange turn his day had taken.

"A father that's not human scum? How nice..." he mused to himself sarcastically.

The mansion stood, rooted firmly in its enormous estate, the stone walls enormous against the vibrant green of the surrounding gardens. It was imposing—no, magnificent—it was telling to the wealth and status of its owner, who had clearly spared no expense in constructing this home. The massive stone walls, aged and weathered, had been expertly crafted.

The roof, made of terracotta red clay tiles, was crowned with turrets and chimneys that rose high, their sharp silhouettes reaching up to the sky. The towering structure had not one, but multiple stories, each ascending. The windows, tall and narrow, seemed like great, dark eyes. Above them, iron balconies and railings, beautifully wrought with curls and scrolls.

As Mikoto and Fiona approached the mansion's grand entrance, it became impossible to ignore. The door itself—a large wooden behemoth set into a stone archway—seemed to stand as a final blockade.

The heavy door swung open with a groan, almost as if it too were sighing from the weight of its years, and they entered the mansion. Immediately, Mikoto was enveloped by the magnitude of the hall that greeted them. It was a circular chamber, as if the house itself was built in the round, with the ceiling soaring above them like a great cathedral. Hundreds of flickering candles lined the walls.

Suits of armor—old and new—stood guard in each corner, surrounding the room were several painting, each depicting different scenes, one caught his eye of a woman who looked a lot like Fiona but with black hair. He noted how the girls gaze darkened ever so slightly as it passed the painting. Painful memories no doubt.

Above them, a grand staircase spiraled upward, its banister carved from dark wood, winding like a snake up to the higher floors. Mikoto could not help but marvel at the splendor of it all, though he also noticed the distinct lack of servants—a glaring absence that seemed odd for a mansion of this size. The silence that accompanied them through the hall only deepened the strange, eerie feeling that had begun to settle over him.

Fiona continued on with the ease of someone familiar with the surroundings. "Hm, my father isn't here at the moment," she murmured, almost as if speaking to herself. Mikoto raised an eyebrow, about to ask how she knew that, but before the question could form, she answered with a casual flick of her hand. "He must be away on some manner of business; it matters not, I suppose."

Her casualness only deepened Mikoto's confusion, and just as he was about to open his mouth to inquire further, she raised her right hand and snapped her fingers. In an instant, the world around him seemed to shudder—his vision blurred, darkened, then distorted like a broken mirror being hastily repaired. The room around him seemed to vanish, and in its place, a completely new space materialized—a large bedroom, far more opulent than any he had ever seen.

The room was enormous, the centerpiece being an extravagant king-sized bed with plush, luxurious white linens. Everything screamed wealth—large, white wardrobes decorated with golden, swirling patterns stood proudly against one wall. The floor was covered by a plush carpet, soft and detailed with designs that seemed to float above the marble beneath. A chandelier hung from the ceiling like a beacon, its crystals casting a glow. A single window with delicate curtains, let in the warm sunlight.

Mikoto stood frozen, completely bewildered by the sudden change of scenery. His mind was racing, trying to process what had just happened. "Was that...? Teleportation magic?"

Fiona, now leaning casually against the doorframe, smiled and nodded. "Yes, a form of teleportation magic. Quite difficult to use, especially when you have to transport someone else. But here, in my domain, it's far easier. My blood is tied to this place, after all. But that's a story for another time."

Her casual tone only added to Mikoto's growing confusion, but he chose not to question it further, especially considering the weight of everything else that had transpired.

"This will be your room for the time being," she continued, her voice snapping Mikoto back to the present. "I'm not sure when my father will return, but rest assured, he would be delighted to have a guest. Though, you may want to be prepared for his... eccentricities." Fiona's lips curved upward as she said this, a hint of amusement playing on her features. "You see, with no servants in the house, the old fool gets lonely fairly quickly."

Mikoto could only nod absently, still processing everything, but his focus was soon redirected by a far more pressing matter. "So when will the training begin again?" he asked, his voice betraying the impatience that had started to bubble within him.

Fiona waved her hand dismissively, as if the answer were trivial. "It's not so much training, Mikoto. More like me giving you some details on magic. As a spawn of Octavia, you're likely more talented than I or anyone else. You've got a leg up, that's for sure. But that's neither here nor there. Make yourself comfortable; I'll be back soon enough."

With that, she vanished in a swirl of light, leaving Mikoto alone in the grand room.

"Could that be what I need?" he wondered aloud, his voice barely above a whisper as he looked around the room. "Teleportation magic... Can it help me reach the goal I've set?"

For now, however, there was nothing to do but wait, to let the silence settle in and grow. The room felt impossibly large, as if it were mocking him, reminding him of just how small he was in this strange world.

Chapter 7: Chapter 5: This damn old man!

"Kuso yaro!"

A sharp string of syllables—bitten out in frustration—escaped Mikoto's lips as he found himself unceremoniously planted onto the grassy ground. The impact sent a dull ache pulsing up his spine, and he winced, his hands digging into the earth as he tried to suppress his irritation.

The perpetrator of this most humiliating moment—this heinous crime against his pride—stood before him, arms crossed, exuding an air of insufferable amusement.

Arthur Von Achenbach.

A towering hulk of a man, wrapped in sheer muscle. His slicked-back pink hair (yes, pink—yet somehow it didn't diminish his imposing aura in the slightest) gleamed under the afternoon sun, and despite his 'masculine' nature, his choice of hair color was—well, it was a choice. His white buttoned shirt, with its sleeves rolled up, barely contained the bulging mass of sinew beneath, his biceps straining against the fabric with each minuscule movement.

And yet, despite his absurdly intimidating physique, this mountain of a man had the personality of a golden retriever that had somehow gained human form.

He tilted his head, eyes alight with curiosity. "There you go, speaking in that language again." His voice was smooth and maddeningly amused. Then, after a dramatic pause, his expression brightened as if he had solved a great mystery. "Ah, I know! You're cursing, aren't you?"

His giddy tone—like a child proudly answering a question correctly in class—only served to rub more salt into Mikoto's wounded dignity.

Mikoto dusted off his clothes, expression deadpan. "You figured it out. Way to go, you."

Arthur grinned wider. "Come now, boy, there's no need for sass!" He threw a hearty laugh into the air, the deep boom of his voice reverberating through the courtyard. Then, in one swift motion, his massive palm came down in a friendly yet devastating clap against Mikoto's back.

"Ghk—!"

Mikoto barely kept himself from face-planting a second time, his whole body jerking forward from the sheer force of it. Was this a 'friendly' gesture or an assassination attempt?

Still, he grumbled, "Forgive me for my lack of enthusiasm at having my ass handed to me."

Arthur's boisterous laughter shook the air itself. "There's no need to be so sour, dear boy! You're doing fairly well; I dare say you're even better than my dear little Fiona when she started out!"

Mikoto's eye twitched. Oh, well, that's great, isn't it? A backhanded compliment if he ever heard one. Who wouldn't want to be compared to a girl who started combat training years ago? He took a deep breath, forcing himself to remember that violence

wasn't always the answer—except when it was, and unfortunately, he was still in the process of mastering that particular skill.

Yes, this was Duke Arthur Von Achenbach—his so-called physical trainer, a request from Fiona.

A request.

And because Fiona was too stubborn for her own good, Mikoto had somehow ended up here—sparring with this giant doofus for the past week, training in physical combat on top of his already exhaustive magical studies.

And the worst part?

As massive as Arthur was, as physically imposing as he appeared—Mikoto was superior in both strength and agility.

It was the most infuriating part of it all.

Even without any formal martial training, he was faster. Stronger. He could probably break Arthur's bones if he didn't hold back. But what good was raw power if he didn't know how to use it? If he couldn't control it? If he couldn't strike effectively in a real fight?

Strength without skill was meaningless.

And apparently, Luminare Academy—where he'd be attending—taught more than just magic. According to Fiona, there were also courses in alchemy, enchantments, and even physical combat.

Which meant one thing: he had to prepare himself.

The Achenbach mansion's library had been an invaluable resource in that regard. He had spent countless hours poring over magical theories, absorbing knowledge at an unnatural rate. Magic was simple, easy, especially with a proper reference. If you knew science, you could replicate magic with shocking ease. Fire, water, destruction, healing—it all came down to understanding the composition of mana and the laws governing reality.

And teleportation?

That was his main focus.

There were no records of world travel. None. Not even in one of the most extensive libraries in the kingdom.

Which meant teleportation was the next best thing.

And as a spawn of Octavia, Mikoto could wield it instinctively. The moment he laid eyes on a spell, its inner workings unraveled before him. It was like cheating.

But enough about that.

Because right now—Mikoto was about to punch this man's smug face in.

His body tensed, every muscle ready as he lunged forward, a blur tearing across the area. The wind whipped past his ears, his vision locked onto Arthur's grinning face.

His right fist snapped back—a perfect, devastating strike aimed straight for Arthur's jaw.

Arthur dodged.

A simple sidestep—effortless.

Mikoto's momentum carried him past his target, his speed betraying him.

And before he could adjust, his body slammed into the courtyard wall with a resounding crash.

A few bricks crumbled.

Mikoto grimaced. "Tch—"

Arthur, completely unbothered, let out a booming laugh. "Nice try, my boy! But you're too telegraphed."

Mikoto exhaled sharply, rolling his shoulders. "Noted."

He reset his stance—left foot forward, weight balanced.

This body. This strength. This speed. He still wasn't used to it. He wasn't used to being shorter. His reach had diminished. His stride was different. His sense of distance was off. A single miscalculation could send him flying into the next area.

But right now—

He wanted to wipe that smug look off Arthur's face.

His leg bent.

And then the ground cracked beneath his feet. He shot forward—an explosion of force tearing across the field. His right fist cocked back—a feint.

Arthur moved to dodge—

A trap.

At the last second, Mikoto's left leg snapped upward—a vicious axe kick aimed for his chin.

Arthur dodged again—leaning back by mere inches.

"Tch."

Mikoto slammed his foot down. The earth shattered, cracks splintered outward. Chunks of stone and dirt erupted into the air. Arthur stumbled—

Mikoto struck.

His right leg snapped up—a high-speed kick straight to Arthur's head.

Arthur blocked.

Bone cracked.

Arthur became a ragdoll, his feet left the ground. His massive form hurtled through the air.

BOOM!!!

Arthur crashed through the mansion wall.

Mikoto blinked.

"...Ah. Shit."

"Hahahaha! I haven't been hit like that in quite some time!"

The booming voice of Arthur filled the luxurious chamber, vibrating through the extravagant paintings and bouncing off the polished wooden beams. The sheer gusto in his laughter was almost enough to shake the grand chandelier overhead, its gilded frame swaying slightly as if in reaction to his amusement.

Yet, for all his bravado, the reality of the situation was far less dignified. One arm now lay wrapped in a thick cast, immobilized entirely. His head was adorned with a multitude of bandages, making him look less like a gallant noble and more like a battle-worn tavern drunk who had lost a particularly unforgiving game of dice. Despite this

undeniable proof of his defeat, Arthur laughed with the kind of glee only a complete fool could manage.

And his daughter?

She simply stared.

Not with worry. Not with sympathy.

But with the exact look one gives a particularly idiotic dog who just ran headfirst into a tree.

"Foolish old man!" Fiona exhaled sharply, pinching the bridge of her nose as if she were enduring the greatest of burdens. "That is what you get for underestimating your opponent."

Her eyes flicked down to her father's overgrown bed—a piece of furniture so ludicrously oversized that it could comfortably fit five grown men and still have space for a grand feast. Indeed, everything about this chamber was over-the-top: the gilded columns, the massive floor-to-ceiling windows, the unnecessarily opulent canopy draped above his bed, and of course, the overwhelming presence of Arthur himself, lounging comfortably despite his injuries.

"Come now, little Fiona!" Arthur dismissed her scolding with a grin as wide as the mountains of Verdantis. "It is but a scratch! Your dear old dad will be out of bed soon, good as new!"

From across the room, Mikoto, who had remained painfully still, shifted awkwardly.

"Uh... still sorry," he muttered.

His red eyes flicked toward the gigantic man lying before him, guilt lingering in his gaze.

Truth be told, he had definitely gone overboard.

After being put on the ground far too many times in their little spar, he had allowed frustration to seep in—his normally composed demeanor giving way to unfiltered irritation. One moment, Arthur was standing—taunting, laughing, and standing tall like some kind of unshakable titan. The next? He was airborne.

All it had taken was a single kick.

The kind of kick that sent a full-grown, seasoned warrior soaring like a sack of potatoes flung from a catapult.

And now here they were.

Arthur, battered but unbroken. Fiona, exasperated but amused. Mikoto, regretful but... also slightly proud?

"You've nothing to apologize for, dear boy!" Arthur smacked his good hand against his casted arm with a hearty chuckle. The loud *thunk* echoed through the room, making both Fiona and Mikoto visibly wince as if they could feel the secondhand pain.

"I'm just glad to see you finally dish out this much punishment! And from a single kick, too! That's a spawn of Octavia for you!"

"It seems you need another head injury." Fiona muttered under her breath.

Arthur did not seem to hear her.

Mikoto, meanwhile, sighed. "I still think I went way too far."

"Nonsense," Fiona immediately shot back, her lips curling into a smirk. "I wish you went harder on him."

"Fiona!" Arthur gasped, clutching his chest in feigned devastation. "Such hurtful words to your beloved father! Have you no shred of filial piety? Are you not concerned that I might shed a tear?"

Fiona's response was a singular, uninterested glance.

"Please do," she deadpanned.

Arthur made a truly dramatic gasp—one so exaggerated that he almost toppled off the side of his gigantic bed.

Fiona, wholly unbothered, simply turned away.

"Come, Mikoto," she called out, already walking toward the exit. "Father can busy himself with his work as duke. I've something to show you in the meantime."

Mikoto hesitated for exactly three seconds, glancing back at Arthur with a last sheepish apology before quickly following after Fiona.

"So you're... not angry?" Mikoto asked once they were well into the manors vastly decorated hallways.

"About you injuring my father?" Fiona glanced at him before letting out a small laugh. "Of course not. My father is an irresponsible old dog who takes any excuse to slack off. Serves the old fool right for underestimating you."

She shook her head as they walked—the soft clack of her heels against the marble floor setting a rhythm to their conversation. But then, without warning—

She stopped.

Mikoto, not expecting the sudden halt, barely avoided crashing into her.

He blinked. "What's wrong?"

Fiona said nothing at first, but then she raised her right hand. A brilliant blue light flickered to life in her palm, twisting and condensing until—

A mask materialized from the air.

Mikoto stared at it.

It was stark white, smooth, with two hollow oval-shaped eyes and a grinning mouth carved into the lower section—a toothy, unsettling grin.

"A magical item of my own creation," Fiona said, a hint of pride in her voice as she handed it to him. "I call it the 'Fool's Mask.'"

Mikoto turned it over in his hands.

"What does it do?"

"It alters your outer appearance," she explained, "changing your hair, facial structure, even your body. But the effect disappears the moment it is removed. A simple charm will keep it from falling off at the wrong moment."

Mikoto nodded. "Thanks... but why give it to me?"

Fiona tilted her head, utterly shameless.

"I'm using you to satisfy my curiosity."

"..."

"And this is the least I can do. If others learn you're a spawn of Octavia, your life will never be quiet."

Mikoto frowned. "Would it really be that bad?"

Fiona's expression turned thoughtful.

"Oh, you'd be courted by countless women," she said, casually.

Mikoto froze.

"Many would believe that mating with you would guarantee a child of the same blessing."

Mikoto visibly twitched.

"You'd also be one of the kingdom's most important figures, but trust me—that is not a good thing."

Mikoto stared blankly at her.

"Most importantly," she continued, "you'd likely be pressured into mating with the other spawn of Octavia."

"Yep," he muttered. "Wearing this forever. But there's something I've been meaning to ask about Octavia and all," Mikoto began, his voice carrying a note of curiosity. "I know her blessing is rare, but why is she so important? From your library, I read that there were Gods of creation, destruction, and even time. Wouldn't the blessings of those Gods be far more significant?"

His words hung in the air for a moment before Fiona gave a soft hum, her gaze narrowing slightly as she mulled over the question. She crossed her arms, her nails tapping against her sleeves. "A fair inquiry," she conceded. "Concepts such as creation, destruction, and time are undeniably fundamental to existence. They shape the foundation upon which all things stand. However..." She let the word linger, her eyes flashing with something unreadable.

"Magic," she continued, tilting her head slightly. "Magic is the force that interweaves all of those concepts together. It is neither bound by time nor shackled by destruction or creation. It is both the bridge and the unrelenting storm that surges between them. Magic is potential, unfiltered and boundless. That is what sets Octavia apart."

Mikoto remained silent, digesting her words, but Fiona was not finished. She stepped forward, her expression sharpening, her voice growing firmer. "The Goddess of War, Magic, and Navigation was not simply revered for these aspects individually but because she embodied something greater. She was the one who commanded magic in its truest form. She wove spells beyond mortal comprehension—spells that could alter fates, defy inevitability, and shape the fabric of existence. Octavia was not merely a Goddess of magic; she was magic itself, a being who stood at the precipice of infinite possibilities."

Mikoto's fingers curled slightly. "...If that's true, then wouldn't there be others like her? If magic is limitless, then someone else should've reached that pinnacle."

Fiona scoffed. "You misunderstand. Potential does not equate to mastery. There have been others who wielded immense magical power, yes. But to claim that any could rival Octavia? Foolishness. To this day, no other deity has ever matched her in sheer magical command. Even Gods who hold dominion over grand concepts are restricted by their own laws. A God of destruction destroys. A God of creation creates. A God of time moves within time's flow. But Octavia? She was beholden to nothing. She could conjure, annihilate, traverse the threads of fate, bend reality to her will, and still stand unchained."

Her eyes bore into his. "Do you understand now? That is why her blessing is coveted beyond all else. It is not simply rare. It is a fragment of something that should not be attainable by mortals or even deities lesser than her."

Mikoto exhaled, deep in thought. It made sense now. His ability to conjure magic freely, to manifest and alter spells at will—was it truly because of his own talent? Or was it the result of Octavia's blessing running through him veins? If what Fiona said was true, then he was wielding something far more terrifying than he had originally believed. If he could learn to master it, then perhaps—

A flicker of an idea passed through his mind. If Octavia had wielded magic that defied all concepts, then perhaps world travel was not just possible—it was inevitable. He had to push further.

"But you know..." Fiona suddenly mused, breaking him from his thoughts. A contemplative look overtook her features, her lips pursed slightly. "It just occurred to me that all our conversations are one-sided—you asking, and me enlightening you."

Mikoto blinked. "Is something wrong with that?"

"Of course there is, you dolt!" She shot back, looking mildly offended. "Do you think I exist solely to answer your questions? Where is the exchange? The depth? I refuse to be some walking encyclopedia for you!"

Mikoto, taken aback, almost laughed. "I mean, I just thought you were interested in seeing how I develop. You're only helping me this much because I'm a spawn of Octavia, aren't you?"

She huffed, turning on her heel. "That may be how it started, but now I am more invested than that. Come, we shall go for tea. I wish to know more about you."

"That's kind of random, no? I thought you were only interested in me because of my—"

"Oh hush. Come now." Without waiting for his input, she grabbed his wrist, dragging him forward with surprising force.

Mikoto let himself be pulled along, sighing internally.

("Women.")

It was a quaint little building that looked like it had been plucked right out of a fairy tale, but maybe that description was too accurate. The building's white walls were adorned with patterns of vines and flowers that climbed up the sides of the structure, giving it a whimsical look. The entrance to the old-fashioned cafè was framed by a bright red door that had a brass knocker in the shape of a dragon's head.

Once one entered the cafe, they would be transported to another world altogether. The interior was dimly lit, but the soft glow of the fairy lights strung up all around the room added a magical touch. The cafe was filled with antique furnishings, including an old grandfather clock that ticked away in the corner and a vintage velvet couch that was tucked away in a cozy nook.

On the counter, one would notice that it was made of dark wood. Behind it, there was a display case filled with an array of delectable treats, from sugary cakes to savory cakes, all served on mismatched china and silverware. There were also jars filled with colorful candies and other sweets lining the counters.

This place seemed semi-modern in a way, to him at least. And only to him, most likely.

Seated at one of the more secluded tables, Mikoto idly tapped a finger against the eerie mask covering his face, his other hand resting against the polished wood of the tabletop. The silver-rimmed teacup before him remained untouched. Across from him sat a familiar figure, her eyes watching him with keen amusement.

"Is the mask uncomfortable?" Fiona inquired. "If so, I could weave an enchantment to make it less bothersome."

Mikoto gave a slight shake of his head. "No, it's fine. Just getting used to it." His voice, slightly deeper than before.

The small, effeminate albino boy that had once been him was gone. In his place sat someone entirely different—a figure with shoulder-length, wild raven-black hair, his form noticeably taller, his body leaner yet more structured. The mask's enchantment had altered him in ways far beyond a simple disguise; as long as he wore it, his height, skin tone, body structure, and even the natural sharpness of his features had shifted into something unrecognizable. And yet, despite its effectiveness, Mikoto couldn't help but wish it weren't so... unsettling. The design of the mask had earned him more than a few lingering stares from the other patrons, their eyes flitting toward him before quickly looking away, as if fearing that prolonged eye contact might invoke some curse.

"That is good," Fiona mused, taking a dainty sip from her porcelain teacup before setting it back onto its matching saucer with a soft clink. Then, with a sudden but small

tilt of her head, she regarded him with a faint smile. "Now, Mikoto, tell me about yourself."

Mikoto blinked, his fingers pausing against the rim of his cup.

She was genuinely interested.

And for some reason... that felt far more disarming than anything else that had transpired that evening.

Chapter 8: Chapter 6: Interrupted and progress?

Across from iona, Mikoto exhaled through his nose, his fingers absentmindedly tapping against the eerie white mask covering his face. His other hand reached toward his coffee but hesitated before grasping the cup, as if weighing whether it was worth the effort.

Before he could answer, a presence approached, light footsteps tapping against the wooden floor. The waitress had returned.

She appeared to be around eighteen, with strikingly lime-green hair falling over her shoulders in thick waves. Her uniform was an elaborate shade of deep emerald, decorated with lace and embroidered details that made her look like she belonged in some exotic noble's manor rather than a simple café. She was expressionless, carrying an air of professionalism that bordered on complete indifference.

Without a word, she placed a delicate set of treats in front of Fiona, then set down another plate before Mikoto.

"Thank you," Fiona said with practiced politeness, inclining her head ever so slightly.

"Thanks." Mikoto's response was gruffer but still appreciative.

The waitress didn't acknowledge their words, simply turning on her heel and gliding away, as silent and ghost-like as she had arrived.

Mikoto watched her leave for a moment before turning his attention back to Fiona, who had settled back into her chair, one delicate finger tapping against her chin as if deep in thought.

"So, anything specific you want to know?" Mikoto asked, tilting his head slightly. The mask made it difficult to read his expression, but his tone was expectant.

Fiona's lips curled into a smirk. "Hmm... I suppose I am rather curious about your homeland." Her eyes sparkled with intrigue. "But, if I were to be honest, I would say I am far more interested in your family." She propped her elbow onto the table, resting

her chin in her palm. "I happened to catch a glimpse of a certain picture on that strange device of yours."

Mikoto blinked behind his mask before realization hit him. "Right, my phone." He scratched the back of his head, shifting slightly in his seat. "Well, I guess I can tell you about them."

He took a sip of his coffee, letting the bitter warmth sit on his tongue before continuing.

"There's my mother—the best woman in the world and one hell of a mom." A genuine smile tugged at his lips behind the mask, his tone carrying an unmistakable fondness. "I love her more than anything."

Fiona arched an eyebrow. "I find it surprising how openly affectionate you are about your mother."

"What's so surprising?" Mikoto asked, the mask tilting slightly as he gave her a sidelong glance.

"Oh, nothing." Fiona waved a hand dismissively, though her smirk suggested otherwise.

Mikoto gave a slight shake of his head before continuing. "Then there's my little sister, Hinata. An annoying little snot, but... even so, I love her." He exhaled, drumming his fingers against the table. "She's kind of a brat most of the time, but... I can't help but be overprotective of her."

Fiona chuckled, her ears twitching slightly. "Ah, so you have a sibling." She mused, swirling her tea absently. "And she sounds like quite the character."

"She is." Mikoto leaned back slightly. "But I bet you have plenty of interesting family stories yourself."

Fiona hummed, setting her cup down once more. "Perhaps, but I imagine my upbringing was quite different from yours."

Mikoto hesitated before asking, "Dunno if this is an inappropriate question, but your ears—I noticed your father didn't have them." The moment the words left his mouth, he mentally slapped himself. That was stupid, wasn't it?

Fiona didn't seem offended, though. Instead, she let out an amused exhale through her nose. "My mother was a Solkari. Their children take after them upon birth, hence my distinct physiology."

Mikoto mulled over that for a moment. He had noticed the absence of her mother at the mansion, but... that wasn't a subject he was going to touch.

Instead, he chose another question. "Speaking of the mansion—it's huge. But I didn't notice any servants while walking around. Yet, the place is always... spotless."

Fiona let out a soft chuckle. "Well, it's all thanks to magic, dear Mikoto." She said it so matter-of-factly that he suddenly felt like an idiot.

("Of course. Everything absurd in this world can just be attributed to magic.") He thought with a shake of his head.

Just as he opened his mouth to respond, a third voice cut into their conversation.

"Oh, Fiona? It is you!"

Mikoto saw the exact moment Fiona's face morphed from relaxed amusement to sheer, barely concealed annoyance. Her pink brows twitched, her lips pressing into a thin line before she forcibly smoothed her expression into a blank mask.

The approaching footsteps grew louder, and then, appearing before them was—

A girl, slightly older than Mikoto, with dazzling golden ringlets falling down her shoulders. She had a delicate, doll-like face with a button nose and strikingly brilliant blue eyes. She was dressed in an elaborate gown of deep royal blue, embroidered with golden threads, making her look like she had stepped straight out of a noble's portrait.

"My, my," the blonde girl began, a smirk playing on her lips. "When I heard that you had returned to the capital, I could hardly believe it."

Mikoto could almost feel Fiona rolling her eyes.

"Your father was quite worried during your absence," the girl continued, her smirk widening, "but worry not! I kept him company. We had a splendid time conversing and savoring fine tea."

Fiona's expression did not change. "That is swell, Victoria. But I fail to see how any of that concerns me, as I do not recall ever asking."

"Oh, come now, Fiona, dear." Victoria's voice carried the kind of theatrical lilt one might expect from a noblewoman accustomed to getting her way. "There's no need to be so... heh... moody." She then tilted her head, her smirk curling. "Or perhaps the correct term would be jealous?"

Fiona's chair screeched against the floor as she abruptly stood up, her eyes blazing.

Mikoto, sipping his coffee, internally braced himself.

Then, Victoria's gaze flickered toward him, and her lips curled into something even more amused.

"My, my..." She pressed a hand to her lips, eyes glinting. "Is it really possible? Has someone finally managed to court Fiona von Achenbach?"

"No, you fool!" Fiona's voice practically echoed through the café, earning a few startled glances.

Victoria merely giggled behind her hand. "No need for a scene, Fiona, dear."

Mikoto, watching all this unfold, thought to himself:

("What a douche.")

"I was merely surprised, is all."

If looks could kill, then the blistering, red-faced glare that Fiona leveled at Victoria Eizenberg would have reduced the blonde to dust on the spot. The heat radiating from her stare could have melted through steel, left a crater in the earth, and possibly ignited a small wildfire.

Victoria, however, was utterly unfazed—no, worse than that—she seemed amused.

"But I neglected to properly introduce myself. My apologies." The blonde's voice was smooth, airy, and laced with the kind of aristocratic self-importance that made Mikoto want to physically recoil. She turned away from Fiona with a graceful pivot, her dress flowing dramatically as if she had rehearsed this motion a hundred times in front of a mirror.

She set her sharp gaze back onto him.

"I am known as Victoria Eizenberg, daughter of Duke Victor Eizenberg." Her tone carried the effortless superiority of someone who expected her name alone to part seas and halt wars. "Charmed, I'm sure."

She extended a delicate hand toward him—not in a gesture of greeting, not for a handshake. She expected him to kiss it.

Mikoto stared at the hand. Then back at her face.

("Is this girl an idiot?")

He was wearing a mask.

Could she not see it? Did she expect him to phase through it like some kind of spirit? Was he supposed to telepathically press his lips against her hand through sheer willpower?

He exhaled slowly, resisting the very deep, very real urge to sigh into oblivion. Instead, he reached out and grasped her hand firmly, giving it the most plain, uninspired, dead-fish handshake imaginable.

The moment of contact was brief, fleeting and awkward.

Victoria's face twitched—just a fraction—but Mikoto caught it. The faintest downward tug of her lips before she forced them back into an immaculate, practiced smirk.

"Mikoto." His introduction was curt. No embellishments, no titles, no unnecessary flair.

Victoria withdrew her hand with poise, shaking it off slightly like he'd just committed some kind of mild social offense. Then, like a switch flipping, she let out an exaggerated sigh of delight, placing a hand over her heart.

"What a charming name!" she sang, as if she had just been gifted the most delightful trinket. "I quite fancy it."

Mikoto simply stared at her, unblinking.

("This is the most painfully insincere person I have ever met.")

Fiona, meanwhile, was glaring daggers at Victoria with enough intensity to cut through stone.

"Was there something you wanted, Victoria?" Fiona's voice was acidic, dripping with hostility. "Or were you just so insufferably bored that you decided to waste my time?"

Victoria simply tilted her head, regarding Fiona with mock innocence.

"There's no need to be so harsh, Fiona." Her words were sweet. "I merely wished to greet an old friend."

Fiona's scoff was immediate, loud, and filled with pure, undiluted skepticism.

"But I must say..." Victoria continued, her gaze sliding back toward Mikoto with a glint of something he did not like. "Your mysterious friend here has piqued my curiosity."

Mikoto felt her gaze rather than saw it. A slow analytical stare. One that lingered just a bit too long.

("Yeah, I hate that.")

She smiled. "But I suppose my curiosity will be sated at a later date."

Then, with a flourish of golden curls, she turned on her heel, waved elegantly, and drifted away like she had just performed a grand orchestral piece and was awaiting applause.

There was a moment of silence.

"What an insufferable prat." Fiona barked, flopping back into her chair like she had just run a marathon of annoyance.

Mikoto, still staring after Victoria's retreating form, finally turned back to Fiona, crossing his arms. "...I'm gonna go out on a limb and guess you don't like her?"

Fiona let out the deepest, most exasperated sigh known to mankind.

"Dislike' does not begin to express the calamity-level detestation I feel for that brat."

Mikoto blinked. "...That bad, huh?"

Fiona scoffed. "That bad? That worse. That horrific. That a 'if she was hanging off the edge of a cliff and I had a free hand, I would use it to wave goodbye' kind of bad."

Mikoto snorted.

Fiona, still radiating pure fury, crossed her arms, ears twitching erratically in residual irritation.

Mikoto leaned back, tilting his head slightly. ("Hmm... seems like there's some history between them.")

Obvious, sure. But not his business.

("Still...") He flicked a glance at Fiona. She was still glaring at nothing in particular, muttering something under her breath about "braindead aristocrats" and "if only I had a sword."

Her entire mood had darkened considerably.

("So much for getting to know each other.")

Not that he minded. But...

He glanced down at his coffee.

...He did kind of prefer the version of Fiona that was bantering with him, rather than the one that looked like she was mentally committing murder.

Even after a week, the sheer vastness of this city still caught him off guard. The streets twisted and stretched, an endless maze of towering structures, arched bridges, and plazas, each corner offering some new spectacle, some work of stone and glass. Galadriel, the so-called Crown Jewel, stood as a masterpiece of civilization— life that never failed to leave a lingering impression.

And yet, it wasn't home.

Mikoto exhaled quietly, standing near a wide avenue, watching as the last rays of sunlight painted the city. He could hear the soft hum of the people—merchants closing their stalls, lovers strolling along the bridges, armored knights clanking as they made their evening patrols. The distant ringing of a bell tower echoed over the rooftops, marking the approach of night.

Despite the beauty of it all, something about staying too long in one place suffocated him.

Fiona had left in a foul mood, her temper still frayed from that unwanted encounter with Victoria. She had barely said a word before storming off back to the mansion. Mikoto had considered following her at first, but in the end, he let her go.

The mansion was grand, yes—far larger than anywhere he had ever lived before—but big did not mean comfortable. If anything, those extravagant halls felt confining.

He needed space. A change of scenery.

("I guess I still have some time before I need to attend that academy.")

His gaze drifted toward the distant castle, its silhouette sharp. Soon enough, he would be pulled into the routines of the academy—lessons, politics, endless expectations. But for now, he had freedom. And freedom, for Mikoto, meant experimenting.

Not with people. Not with diplomacy. Not with the nonsense of noble society.

With magic.

A low hum resonated from deep within his body, a pulse of mana, warm and potent.

And in the next instant—

—he was gone.

To the outside observer, it must have seemed like he had blinked out of existence, the space where he had stood now vacant.

To Mikoto, however, it was a mere shift in perception. The city blurred, twisted, then reassembled around him in the span of a heartbeat. The streets were gone, replaced by the cracked stone of an abandoned rooftop.

There was no dizziness. No delay. No disorientation.

("There. As simple as that.")

He sat himself down on the building's edge, his legs hanging freely over the side as he gazed at the city from above. A cool wind drifted past, ruffling his coat, carrying with it the scent of fresh rain, spices from the marketplace, and the distant smoke of forges still burning.

From this height, the world felt smaller.

And yet, it still wasn't small enough.

Mikoto exhaled sharply, reaching up to his mask.

The moment his fingers pulled it away, the shift was instantaneous.

His entire body adjusted, subtly. His frame shrank, just slightly. His skin paled, the already ghostly tone becoming something even more unnatural. His hair shortened, tousled—and then drained of all color, turning a stark white.

A curse. A blessing. A burden. A gift.

Whatever it was, it felt wrong.

"Never going to get used to this feeling..." he muttered, voice softer now. His fingers tightened around the mask before resting it in his lap.

The weight of it was always heavier than he expected.

Time passed. How long? A few minutes? An hour? It didn't matter.

Because despite everything—the training, the wealth of magic at his disposal, the connections he was making—he was making no progress on what truly mattered.

Teleportation. Magic. Combat. These things came so easily that they had lost their thrill. Learning a new spell had become as effortless as breathing, wielding mana as simple as moving a limb. He was strong—absurdly strong, even—but it wasn't enough.

Not for what he needed to do.

Not for where he needed to go.

His home was not here.

Mikoto tilted his head back, staring up at the sky.

("I've tried it a hundred times.")

A thousand times.

Envision it. Shape the spell. Picture the location.

Tokyo.

His room. The small, cluttered space that had once been his sanctuary. The old, beaten kotatsu where he used to rest, the worn-out books stacked by his bedside, the tiny window that overlooked the ever-glowing skyline of a world that no longer felt real.

Every attempt. Every single time he tried to teleport there—nothing.

Instead, he would find himself somewhere else entirely, as if the universe itself was mocking him.

A random street. A temple. A forest. A snowfield.

Never home.

Mikoto exhaled, bringing a hand to his temple, rubbing at the forming headache.

("C'mon. Think.")

He bit his thumb absentmindedly, his mind racing.

("For all the talk about how 'gifted' I am with magic, I might as well be an amateur when it comes to this. Spells are easy. World travel? That's something else entirely.")

He ran through the sequence again, just as he always did.

How did he get here in the first place?

The incident. That moment in time when everything changed. It had been—what? A mere second? A shift in the air, a pull at his soul, and then—

He had been here.

("The Blessing of Octavia.")

His lips pressed into a thin line.

Why?

Why her?

Fiona had told him before that Gods chose their spawn at random. There was no rhyme or reason to it. Sometimes it was fate, sometimes it was preference, sometimes it was simply a cruel joke.

But Octavia was not just any deity.

War. Magic. Navigation.

What did she see in him?

More importantly—

("If she was the one who brought me here...")

Then was she the key to getting back?

The thought had crossed his mind before, but never with this much clarity. If anyone could answer his questions, if anyone could explain the mechanics of world travel, then it had to be her.

But how?

How do you reach a Goddess?

Mikoto's fingers tapped idly against his knee.

Was it even possible? Would she even listen? Or was he simply a pawn in a game far larger than himself?

[Achenbach Manor]

"You're curious if there's a way to speak with the Gods?"

Fiona's voice carried an air of faint bewilderment, her brows slightly raised as she tilted her head in curiosity. She was seated atop her bed—an extravagant, canopied thing

adorned with plush silk sheets and embroidered pillows, positioned perfectly in the center of the room.

Mikoto, by contrast, remained near the doorway, his back pressed against the cold wooden frame. Arms folded, one leg slightly bent.

"Yup," he answered without hesitation, his tone steady.

Fiona studied him, her fingers idly playing with a strand of her hair as she considered his request.

"Well..." she began, crossing one leg over the other as she shifted into a more comfortable position. "Even a short answer would be... lengthy."

At her words, a flicker of hope sparked in Mikoto's eyes.

"I've heard tales of the Gods and Goddesses conversing with their spawns in certain ways," Fiona continued, her voice taking on a more thoughtful tone.

Mikoto leaned slightly off the wall, uncrossing his arms. "Certain ways?" he prompted, his curiosity now fully piqued.

"Through dreams," she clarified, her fingers absently tracing the embroidered patterns on the bedsheets. "Or so they say."

Mikoto's brows furrowed slightly. Dreams? That was... disappointingly vague.

"But it's never been proven," Fiona added, noting his skepticism. "The Gods are fickle—some interact with their spawns frequently, while others remain silent for years. And, well... many spawns tend to be quite reclusive. There aren't many reliable testimonies to confirm whether those dreams are truly divine intervention or merely the fabrications of the mind."

Mikoto tapped his fingers against his arm in thought. He had never experienced anything remotely resembling a divine dream—no cryptic visions, no otherworldly whispers, nothing. If the Gods truly spoke through dreams, then he was either being ignored... or he simply wasn't trying hard enough to listen.

"Well, if that's not an option," he muttered, eyes narrowing slightly, "then what else?"

Fiona sighed softly, her expression shifting into something almost apologetic. "Not exactly a better option, but... you could always try visiting a chapel dedicated to one of the Gods. You have noticed how many chapels there are scattered around the capital, haven't you?"

Mikoto gave a slight nod. He had. During his walks through the city, he had seen their grand structures—tall, imposing, built with reverence, each dedicated to a different deity. Some were small, intimate places of worship, while others were towering edifices of faith that commanded awe.

"But what would that do?" he questioned.

Fiona gave a small shrug, her smile turning sheepish. "Who knows? Some people claim that being within a place of divine significance can strengthen their connection to the Gods. Some even pray for days, hoping to receive an answer." She rested her chin on her palm. "Though, somehow, I can't picture you doing that."

Mikoto snorted. "You're right, I wouldn't," he admitted flatly. "I'd rather figure out a more direct method than waste time hoping for some divine voicemail."

Fiona let out a soft laugh at that, shaking her head. "Well, that's all I can offer you on that front. I hope it helps, even if it's not much."

"Hmm... Thanks, Fiona," Mikoto said after a moment. His tone was appreciative, but there was also a hint of something else—something more hesitant.

Fiona caught it immediately. "And...?" she prodded, her lips curving into a smirk.

Mikoto let out a sigh, rubbing the back of his neck. "And... sorry."

The smirk faded slightly, replaced by curiosity. "For what?"

Mikoto shifted his weight, his fingers tightening ever so slightly against his sleeve. "For, well... most of our conversations being me asking you for information like you said. I feel like I keep using you as a walking encyclopedia." He gave a small, sheepish smile. "So, yeah. Sorry about that."

Fiona blinked before breaking into a soft chuckle.

"Think nothing of it, Mikoto," she said lightly, her gaze warm. "If I minded, I wouldn't answer. Besides, it's not like I dislike our conversations. I enjoy them."

Mikoto arched a brow. "Even when they're all about magic theories and divine mysteries?"

Fiona placed a hand over her chest, feigning offense. "You wound me, Mikoto. What kind of scholar would I be if I didn't enjoy discussing the mysteries of the world?"

Mikoto rolled his eyes, but there was a fondness behind it. "Point taken."

A brief silence settled between them—one that wasn't awkward, but comfortable.

"...Honestly," Fiona continued, her voice softening, "I enjoyed our time at the café. It was nice hearing you talk about your family, however brief it was."

Mikoto's fingers twitched slightly at his side. He didn't respond right away.

Fiona tilted her head. "Mikoto?"

"...Yeah," he finally murmured. "That was nice."

There was something subdued in his tone—something distant, almost wistful. Fiona didn't pry. Instead, she simply gave him a radiant smile, letting the warmth of her expression fill the space where words were unnecessary.

Mikoto exhaled lightly and turned towards the door.

"Well, that's good to hear, Fiona-san," he said, offering a small wave. "I'll get out of your hair now. You've helped a lot."

Fiona watched as he moved toward the exit, her eyes alight with something unreadable.

"...Anytime, Mikoto," she murmured.

And with that, he left.

But even as the door closed behind him, Fiona found herself staring at it for a long while, deep in thought.

Chapter 9: Chapter 7: Hunting

"Astrothians—fascinating creatures, really!" Arthur declared with his usual booming enthusiasm, his deep voice cutting through the ambient sounds of the dense forest as they strolled beneath the thick canopy of branches. Sunlight trickled through the leaves but even that natural beauty was not enough to drown out Arthur's overwhelming presence.

"They're beasts originated from the seven Divine Beast that have undergone mutations through mana exposure. The effects vary—some grow stronger, some faster, and some become aggressive beyond reason. Others, however..." He paused dramatically, flashing Mikoto a grin that was far too excited for comfort, "experience an increase in intellect, which makes them all the more troublesome!"

Mikoto, trailing behind the towering man, arched an eyebrow. "Right." His tone was flat.

"But do not let that discourage you, dear boy!" Arthur clapped a massive hand against his back with the force of a war hammer, sending a small shockwave through Mikoto's entire frame.

"It wasn't," Mikoto deadpanned, regaining his balance before dusting himself off. His red eyes narrowed slightly. This was already exhausting.

It had taken two weeks for his injuries to fully heal after his last defeat, and he wasn't about to let that happen again. His solution? More training. Which was why they were now in the middle of this gods-forsaken forest, far from the streets of the capital, tracking dangerous creatures for sport.

Hunting.

Glorious.

"I like your spirit, Mikoto!" Arthur practically bellowed, his voice so loud that it sent a flock of birds exploding from the treetops in a panicked flurry. Mikoto sighed, long and suffering.

"But!" Arthur dramatically raised a finger, "Sometimes, we need more than just spirit to succeed! On with the lesson!"

Mikoto wordlessly gestured for him to continue, internally bracing himself.

"Astrothians are categorized into different danger classes to determine their threat levels! These classes range from D to C, B, A, and finally, S!" Arthur flourished his hands as if he were delivering a grand speech to an audience of thousands, rather than to just one increasingly exasperated teenager. "And of course, Class S creatures are the most fearsome, most formidable, most ferocious—"

"Yeah, I get it," Mikoto cut in. "Most dangerous."

"Indeed!" Arthur wagged a knowing finger before his expression turned conspiratorial. "Ah, but there is an even rarer classification. A mythical class, known only in whispers and the most ancient of texts..."

Mikoto stared at him, unimpressed. "Let me guess—Class Z?"

Arthur beamed, positively gleeful. "Spot on, dear boy!"

Mikoto pinched the bridge of his nose. "And that means...?"

Arthur placed a hand to his chest, exuding pure theatrical energy. "Creatures in this class are said to be kingdom-level threats—monsters so powerful they could reduce entire civilizations to rubble. Dragons, leviathans, titans of unfathomable strength!" He waggled his eyebrows, as if trying to build suspense.

Mikoto exhaled through his nose. "But they don't exist anymore, right?"

Arthur's enthusiasm dimmed. "...Yes, well, *technically*, they are extinct." He cleared his throat. "Which is why Class Z is not officially recognized!"

Mikoto hummed in vague interest. "So, my job is just to kill some Astrothians?" It sounded straightforward enough. Test of skill, test of nerve. No different from before.

"Precisely, dear boy!" Arthur's enthusiasm resurged, nearly knocking Mikoto over with its force.

Mikoto sighed but nodded. Simple enough. He had killed before. This wouldn't be—

His thoughts were cut off by a sudden rumbling.

The ground trembled.

It was faint at first—a subtle vibration beneath his boots—but then came the sound. A deep, thunderous pounding, like the march of some great force.

Mikoto instantly tensed, his instincts screaming danger. His eyes flicked toward the source. In the distance, towering trees began to shake. Leaves shuddered, and branches snapped violently as something mowed through them with brute force.

Arthur, however, was entirely unbothered.

"Aha! I recognize those footsteps anywhere!" Arthur proclaimed proudly, his expression alight with excitement as if this were the best possible development.

Mikoto did a double-take. "Wait—what? You can tell what it is just from the footsteps?!"

"Of course!" Arthur laughed heartily, hands on his hips. "That, dear boy, is the mighty Gorguthrax!"

Mikoto blinked. "A what now?"

Before Arthur could answer, the creature finally emerged.

A massive, hulking form burst forth from the foliage, knocking aside entire trees like they were mere twigs. Leaves and debris exploded into the air, scattering in all directions as the beast stomped into view.

The Gorguthrax was an imposing figure, towering over any human and standing at least 20 feet tall. Its massive frame was covered in patches of matted, coarse hair, which ranged in color from dark brown to ochre.

The most notable feature of it was its singular eye, located in the middle of its wide forehead. The eye was an astonishing size, as large as a few human heads, and its

glinting iris was a deep amber with a hint of brown. The eye was glaring and appeared to almost pulse as it scanned its surroundings.

The monster's face was rugged and weather-beaten, with deep crevices and furrows etched into its flesh, giving it a grizzled, wrinkled appearance. Its nostrils were flared, and its broad jaws were capable of scattering boulders and tearing trees from the ground with immense power.

It wore a crude loincloth made of animal hide, with tangled cords of rope wrapped around its massive arms. Its long legs end in thick, gnarled, and muscular feet, with toenails as sharp as razor blades.

"Well, dear boy, good luck!" Arthur offered, as he merely turned and walked away.

"Oi!" But it seems this creature was more focused on what it had identified as a 'suitable prey', as it charged at him with a roar.

Its movements were slow and plodding, but with each step, the ground trembled beneath its weight. Its roar was deafening, rumbling like thunder across the landscape; it seemed to be able to awaken the terror in the hearts of even the bravest warriors. It reached him in no time as it raised both of its large arms before bringing them down.

As they collided with the ground, a force shook out throughout the ground and the forest as a whole as the ground broke and cracked, but his target was not there.

Poised atop a tree branch he teleported to, Mikoto clicked his tongue.

("That damn old man! You could've told me what crawled around in this damn forest! I nearly had a heart attack seeing this thing!")

"WRAAAAAAAA!" Its shrill roar rang out throughout the forest once more as it noticed him. Its large form lunged at him as everything to the ground and trees rocked violently. It outstretched an arm, looking to grab him with its large hand and crooked nails.

("Haha...oh no, no, no, no, no.") Mikoto was not having this. He did not care if this was a living thing or not; he was not taking any damn chances. Though it looked so damn ugly, it also helped. So as its large form neared, he raised his right arm and pointed his palm at this hideous beast.

His palm crackled with mana as an ominous red glow illuminated it. A sudden hush fell over the area as his magic charged, growing stronger and more powerful with each passing split second. The air seemed to thicken and shake around him, small eddies of wind kicking up leaves and dirt from the forest floor. Then it erupted from his palm like a shot from a canon, a beam of pure mana. It was unleashed with the immense power of

his magic in a single beam that shot forward toward the Gorguthrax. The beam struck the giant monster with a thunderous crash, shaking the earth beneath their feet.

The impact was enormous. It let out a deafening roar as its form was entirely engulfed in the wave of mana, its fur smoldering as the magic burned through its flesh. But the destruction was not over yet. The magic wave had ripped a massive hole through the forest, leveling trees and rocks and sending them hurtling through the air like confetti. He was almost thrown back by the force of the explosion, but he managed to keep his grip on his magic and direct it.

"Haha...." The destruction he was wreaking made him feel something. He increased the output as it turned into a searing beam of energy that blasted through the air like a comet, consuming everything in its path.

The Gorguthrax was gone as Mikoto lowered the output until the beam of mana died down slowly. It was completely eviscerated; he was responsible. He looked up at all of the destruction before him. The dust finally cleared, the forest was in chaos, trees were felled, and rocks cracked. In front of him was now a clearing spanning as far as the eye could see.

He knew he was good at magic, but this was really something else. He caused this much destruction by just shooting out his own mana; it was not even a spell. This was the kind of destruction only some military weapons back home could cause, but he knew that this feeble destruction was only a taste of what he could do. He was capable of more.

"What the hell am I thinking?" He could not help but question himself, since when was seeing how destructive he could be important?

But at least he now knew he would not have much trouble in battle; it was strange. But killing that thing felt good.

[Location: Achenbach Manor]

The ornate halls of Achenbach Manor radiated an air of nobility and refinement as ever.

And yet, none of this luxury mattered as Fiona stood before Mikoto, her arms crossed, her sharp eyes narrowed with concern and curiosity.

She had felt it.

That tremor.

That earth-shattering disturbance.

A phenomenon so violent that even from within the capital, she had sensed its presence.

A noblewoman of her stature was rarely surprised, but at this moment, she found herself scrutinizing the young man before her, demanding answers.

"So you were the cause of that enormous tremor?" Fiona's voice was firm.

Mikoto blinked, tilting his head slightly.

"Wait, you felt the tremor all the way in the capital?"

("Did I really go that overboard?!"

Fiona's gaze sharpened further as she took a step closer, her expression unreadable.

"So it was you..." she murmured, deep in thought, as if piecing together something beyond what he had admitted.

She was aware that her father had taken Mikoto outside the capital to hunt Astrothians. That much she had been informed of. But what kind of opponent would force Mikoto, of all people, to unleash a spell so destructive that a massive section of the forest was now gone?

"...Word is that a large section of the forest is effectively gone," she added.

Mikoto rubbed the back of his neck.

"It was a, uhm..." he started, momentarily hesitating as he tried to recall the name. "The name of it was a Gorgu... something."

Fiona froze.

A chilling stillness overtook her usually composed demeanor.

Her eyes became ice-cold.

"A Gorguthrax?" she asked, her tone dangerously calm.

Mikoto gave a lazy nod. "Yeah, that's the one. Big, mean, and ugly." He mused, recalling its cyclopean visage, the way its massive frame crashed through the forest like an unstoppable force.

A sudden snap broke the momentary silence as Fiona clenched her fists.

"That stupid fool!" she hissed under her breath.

Then, without warning, she lunged forward, closing the distance between them in an instant.

Her hands, previously balled into fists of frustration, suddenly latched onto his shoulders.

Before Mikoto could react, Fiona began frantically scanning him for any sign of injury, her hands gripping his arms, tilting his head slightly, even pressing her fingers to his wrist to feel his pulse.

"Are you alright?! Feeling fine?! Not injured?!" she interrogated, her voice uncharacteristically high-pitched with concern.

Mikoto, caught completely off guard, stiffened at the sudden invasion of personal space.

He instinctively pulled back, though Fiona didn't release him right away.

"I'm fine, really. Why would I be injured?" His brow furrowed slightly as he tried to understand why she was so damn panicked.

Fiona shot him an incredulous look, as if he had just casually shrugged off the apocalypse itself.

"A Gorguthrax is a Class A threat for a very good reason," she stated, exasperation heavy in her voice.

Before he could offer another nonchalant response, she cut him off.

"This is due to the fact that its singular eye—if gazed upon directly—casts a hex upon its prey."

Mikoto's expression didn't change, but his interest was piqued.

"A hex?" he mused. "So, a curse, huh? That doesn't sound fun."

Fiona looked like she was about to strangle him.

"You damn fool—why are you acting so calm?!" she snapped. "Its gaze holds a hex of Death. It turns the target's own mana against them. Your very essence begins to deteriorate—starting from your body to your very soul."

Mikoto blinked.

"...The hell was something like that doing prancing around a forest?"

Fiona exhaled sharply, rubbing her temples as if trying to process how this absolute idiot was still alive.

But Mikoto, seemingly unfazed, simply shrugged.

"Relax. I'm fine. I wasn't hexed or anything." He stuffed his hands into his pockets, his demeanor effortlessly casual. "I think I would've noticed if I were."

Fiona studied him, searching his expression for any trace of false bravado.

Her lips parted slightly as if she wanted to argue further, but after a moment, she simply exhaled.

Her arms crossed once more, but her gaze softened, just slightly.

"...You may be a spawn of Octavia," she muttered, her voice quieter now. "But even so..."

Her eyes locked onto his.

"You're not invincible, Mikoto. You're still human. Remember that."

For a split second, Mikoto saw something in her gaze. A flicker of genuine concern beneath her usual exterior. But just as quickly as it appeared, it vanished.

Fiona turned, her dress swaying as she pivoted on her heel.

"But for now, excuse me—I have some choice words for my dear father."

Mikoto merely watched her storm off, muttering a quiet prayer for Arthur's soul.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the extravagant halls of Achenbach Manor vanished.

Teleportation.

The rich scent of aged wood and expensive perfumes was instantly replaced by the crisp, untamed air of the wild. The dense forest surrounded him once more, its towering trees stretching high above.

A large clearing lay ahead—the same place where he had obliterated the Gorguthrax.

He rolled his shoulders, his fingers lightly flexing.

Arthur may have been an idiot, but his methods were effective. Now, with a real opponent, Mikoto had gained an invaluable realization.

His hypothesis had been confirmed.

Mana, when condensed into a pure beam, was absurdly destructive. If he applied a specific force behind it, the results were catastrophic. Until now, most of his theories had existed solely within his mind.

But now?

He was free to experiment.

Mikoto leisurely walked through the forest as if taking a peaceful stroll.

Training was needed.

He had surmised that a pure beam of mana would be destructive were he to implement a force behind it, but that was all in theory until he killed that Gorguthrax. He saw firsthand what a simple beam of pure mana could do when he implemented the aspects of destruction. Officially, what he used would not even be classified as a spell. But if it did, it would most likely be Tier 3 based on pure destruction.

Tier 1: Basic Spells: These spells are simple and easy to cast, usually used by beginner spellcasters. Examples include illusion spells, minor healing spells, and basic elemental spells.

Tier 2: Advanced Spells: These spells are more complex and require a higher level of skill and experience to cast. Examples include powerful elemental spells, advanced healing spells, and defensive spells.

Tier 3: Master Spells: These spells are extremely powerful and can only be cast by those who have dedicated their lives to studying and mastering magic. Examples include divine spells, small time-manipulation spells, and major elemental or destructive spells.

Tier 4: Forbidden Spells: These spells are considered too dangerous to be used by any spellcaster and are often deemed illegal or outlawed. Examples include spells that manipulate minor aspects of life and death, mind-control spells, and spells that summon or control dark creatures such as demons.

Tier 5: Divine Spells: These spells are only accessible to those chosen by the Gods and are extremely powerful. The Familial Arts.

Of course, he could probably do tier 4 spells easily enough, barring something like summoning dark creatures, which require lengthy rituals and whatnot. Though if he had a reference to work off of, maybe he could summon a demon. Something to think about

Mikoto's footsteps came to a halt as he heard growling.

And just as that thought crossed his mind—

A low growl reverberated from the shadows of the trees. A pair of glowing blue runes flickered in the darkness.

Then another.

And another.

Mikoto exhaled.

A pack of six large, black-furred creatures emerged from the treeline, their bodies alight with a blue glow.

He cracked his knuckles.

"Sorry about this, dogs," he murmured. "But I need the training."

[Location: Achenbach Manor – Dining Hall]

The grand dining hall of Achenbach Manor was bathed in a glow from the massive crystal chandelier overhead, its countless facets refracting light. The scent of freshly brewed tea and fine cuisine lingered in the air, yet neither of its occupants seemed particularly interested in their meals.

Seated at the end of the long, polished dining table was Arthur. Tonight, however, his usual jovial expression had faded, replaced by something rare—concern. His eyes were clouded as he drummed his fingers idly against the armrest of his high-backed chair. Opposite him sat his daughter, she had been in the middle of quietly sipping her tea when her father's words made her pause.

Arthur leaned forward, resting his elbows on the table, his fingers interlacing as he fixed his daughter with an unusually serious gaze.

"Little Fiona, are you sure it's wise not to tell young Mikoto?" His voice lacked its usual lilt.

Fiona merely blinked at him, lowering her teacup with a clink. The swirling steam momentarily obscured her face before dissipating into the air. She looked at him with a neutral expression.

"Tell him of what?" She asked, her tone betraying neither curiosity nor irritation. It was a simple question, straightforward.

Arthur exhaled slowly, rubbing his temples before looking at his daughter with a tired expression.

"You know of what I speak, Fiona." His voice remained steady, but there was an edge to it. "Spawns of the Goddess Octavia are rare, so rare that there have only ever been five throughout history. Seven if you count young Mikoto and the other spawn of this era."

Fiona's fingers tensed slightly around the porcelain of her cup. The fine craftsmanship of the teacup was exquisite—an heirloom of the Achenbach family—yet for the first time, she felt an irrational urge to shatter it.

"Is there a purpose for this history lesson?"

Arthur merely sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"We both know what becomes of spawns when they come of age." His voice darkened, his usually carefree demeanor peeling away. "We have seen it firsthand with the other spawn."

At this, Fiona finally stilled, her breath catching ever so slightly. The atmosphere in the room shifted. Her father's words stirred old recollections of history.

Arthur's expression remained unreadable, but there was no mistaking the grim in his tone as he continued.

"Mikoto is fifteen, correct? Then he has a few months."

Silence.

The only sound that remained was the faint crackling of the fireplace, the wood popping intermittently as flames hungrily consumed the logs within. The glow of the fire flickered across Fiona's features.

She exhaled sharply, her grip on the teacup loosening.

Her father was right.

Even without him saying it aloud, she knew what this conversation entailed. She had always known.

Mikoto was not ready.

No one ever was.

Fiona closed her eyes briefly, willing herself to breathe before reopening them. Her gaze held something far heavier. Her fingers tapped against the edge of the teacup as she finally spoke, her voice carrying resignation.

"Then let's hope he is strong enough, for all our sakes, should it come to it."

She did not look at her father as she said it.

Arthur studied his daughter for a long moment, his expression unreadable. Then, with a slow, nod, he murmured his final words for the night.

"Then I hope he is."

Neither of them spoke again.

Chapter 10: Chapter 8: Luminare Academy of Arcane Arts

[Location: En Route to Luminare Academy – Within a Luxurious Carriage]

The clatter of hooves against the cobbled roads reverberated through the grand carriage, a meticulously crafted masterpiece of polished mahogany.

Mikoto, dressed in the formal uniform of the academy, sat with his posture relaxed. The black button-up shirt he wore was crisp, tucked neatly beneath a waistcoat of midnight black, its fabric decorated with golden filigree. His trousers were of the same shade, their tailored fit accentuating his frame, while his polished dress shoes fit snugly.

Despite the elegance of his attire, there was one thing that stood out.

A mask—an unsettling creation that covered his face entirely, leaving only his piercing eyes visible through the narrow slits.

Fiona, who had been eyeing him with open curiosity, finally spoke, her voice tinged with something akin to amusement.

"I imagine you would look rather dashing, if not for the mask." She tilted her head slightly, as though reconsidering something, before adding with mild regret, "Maybe I should not have made the mask so creepy."

Mikoto, who had been idly resting his fingers against the surface of the mask, merely tapped it once—a hollow sound against the lacquered material.

"It's fine this way."

Was it creepy? Certainly. But it served its purpose well enough. Attention was inevitable, at least for a time. But that was temporary—people moved on, found new distractions. The moment someone more intriguing came along, he would be forgotten.

The princess.

The second princess of the kingdom was also set to attend Luminare Academy for her first year. Compared to her, a mere masked individual would quickly become an afterthought.

Then there was the other Spawn of Octavia—the one Fiona had spoken of. The presence of another Spawn.

And yet, despite all of this, there was a lingering thought that gnawed at him. Mikoto exhaled softly, shifting slightly in his seat before finally voicing the question that had sat unspoken between them.

"Say, is it really fine for me to be wearing this, though?"

The realization that he should have asked this far earlier dawned on him, but at this point, there was little he could do about it. They were already en route.

Fiona responded without hesitation.

"Well, of course it would be fine." She lifted a single hand, gesturing vaguely as she continued, "It is an academy for magic, among a few other things. Having a magical object on your person is fine, as long as you wear your full uniform."

Mikoto hummed in understanding, "I see."

At least they were lenient about it. Compared to his old high school in Japan, where regulations were absurdly strict, this academy seemed surprisingly flexible.

But before he could dwell on that thought, Fiona spoke again, her tone shifting slightly.

"But I don't think I need to tell you that it would be prudent for you to avoid drawing attention."

Mikoto turned to look at her as she paused momentarily before continuing.

"Using magic without glyphs and chants is achievable, but usually, that would take years of practice. So, I implore you to make use of glyphs and chants, even if you have no need for them."

It was a logical precaution, one that he had already accounted for.

"Noted."

Mikoto had never been one to seek attention; if anything, he actively avoided it. That much had never changed. If using glyphs and chants would make him appear ordinary, then so be it.

And yet, his stay at Luminare Academy was never meant to be permanent.

His reasons for enrolling were singular, driven by two motives.

The first was the Spawn of Octavia—the one already attending the academy. According to Fiona, this Spawn was able to utilize her Familial Arts—a technique exclusive to those bearing the blessing of Octavia. If true, then perhaps... he could learn from her.

("Familial Arts sound interesting, the unique abilities achievable by spawns. The ability varies depending on who the God who blessed you is.")

But that was secondary to his true objective.

The library.

Fiona had spoken of it before—a vast sea of knowledge, surpassing even the extensive archives of her own mansion. If there was anywhere he could find something useful, it would be there. A way to travel between worlds. A method to contact Gods. Something. Anything.

He was running out of time.

Mikoto leaned back against his seat, his fingers absentmindedly tapping against the armrest before another question crossed his mind.

"But I have to ask, is it really this easy to get into Luminare Academy?" He turned to her, a hint of skepticism in his tone. "I mean, I heard it was prestigious, but..."

Fiona gave him a knowing look before offering a small, amused smirk.

"No, it's not *that* easy."

She flicked a strand of her pink hair over her shoulder before continuing, a faint air of smugness lacing her words.

"The reason you got in was because of a recommendation from yours truly."

Mikoto exhaled softly. Of course.

She leaned in slightly, her eyes glinting with pride.

"See, I don't mean to boast—"

(She absolutely did.)

"—but I was quite a fine student."

She folded her arms, the smirk widening slightly.

"I even held my own against a number of spawns."

Now she was definitely boasting.

Mikoto merely stared at her.

Fiona, seemingly unfazed, cleared her throat before adding, "But seeing as I'm to be an assistant in this academy this year, the faculty hold me in high regard; again, I'm not boasting."

Mikoto continued staring.

"Uh-huh..."

She was absolutely boasting.

Still, at least he would have a familiar face within the academy—one he had grown accustomed to over the past month. Their interactions had been... pleasant, even if he wasn't sure what to label their relationship just yet.

Perhaps a friend?

...Maybe.

Before he could dwell on the thought further, the carriage slowed to a halt.

Fiona straightened, adjusting her dress before announcing with her usual crispness, "And we have arrived."

The carriage door swung open, revealing the grandeur beyond. Fiona stepped out first, her boots clicking against the cobblestone, before Mikoto followed suit.

And then, he saw it.

Luminare Academy.

A sight so majestic—so immense—that for the first time in a long while, Mikoto found himself at a loss for words.

"Whoa..."

It was the only thing he could utter.

It was an impressive structure that resembled an enormous dark castle, and it was a sight to behold. The castle was made of grayish blue stones that gave the building an aged and majestic look. The castle had a tall structure that towered high into the sky. It was a fortified building with walls that ran all around the perimeter of the school. The walls were made of thick stones and were detailed with geometric patterns.

The castle was surrounded by a beautiful green lawn that was trimmed and well-manicured. The extremely vast green grass was perfect for relaxing and enjoying a picnic under the sun. The grounds of the castle were dotted with tall, leafy trees.

At the front, the castle had a vast entrance that was a few yards wide. Its entrance was tall; there were two large wooden doors that were studded with metal to prevent them from being broken during an attack. Carved into the door was a pattern that showed strange symbols.

"For now, this is where we part, Mikoto." Fiona revealed, and he could not help but blink in confusion. Did she not see how huge this academy was? How was he supposed to find his way around? "New first-year students are to make their way to the auditorium for the Headmaster's speech."

"Fiona, this place is huge; how am I supposed to find it?" He asked incredulously.

"You'll find your way." She just said with a smile. "Everyone in the academy does." She mysteriously stated this before she walked off without another word. Mikoto could just sigh to himself.

"Rotten luck."

The auditorium was grandiose. The seats seemed to be made of the finest materials and lined with velvet cushions, while the floors were made of polished marble. The walls were adorned with paintings and murals. The ceiling was high and vaulted, with chandeliers hanging from gilded chains.

("It took me a while, but I found it.") Mikoto mused as he settled into a seat on the far right and against the wall. Other students were entering and walking around already, so it was only a matter of following them. "But damn, there sure are a lot of people." He could not help but note as more and more would-be students filled their seats. The stage was still empty, so some kids were just chatting and whatnot. Of course, he seemed to be signaled out for obvious reasons.

But honestly, with the array of bright hair colors he was seeing, he could not help but wince as they clashed with the dark uniform of the academy. This was all still so surreal, even after a whole month had passed. But still, he did not think this situation absurd, at least not any more. All he could feel was this kind of anguish that would not go away.

Like a pit in his stomach—the kind of feeling you get when you know something is about to happen. But something had already happened—this little world travel journey of his. More than thirty days, a month later, he has not made an ounce of progress toward his true goal. He has looked through every avenue presented; teleportation was a dead end, and no progress has been made anymore.

The only solution was this academy; if Fiona's words were to be believed, then this place was a haven of knowledge and information waiting for him. There had to be something that could help him. But then again, what was he expecting to find—a nifty spell that could 'poof' him back home?

("What a pain!") Behind his mask, a nasty grimace sat.

"Excuse me?" A voice to his side cut off his thoughts.

"Hm?" He turned to see another boy; of course he was his age, as all in the auditorium were first-years. He had bright blonde hair with bright green eyes, along with a slightly pale complexion and a semi-sculpted face. He was dressed in the same male Luminare Academy uniform.

"Do you mind if I sit here? Most of the other seats are taken." The boy requested with a smile.

"Sure, go ahead." The boy gave him a grateful nod before taking a seat next to him. "William Gregory, a pleasure." The boy introduced himself as he outstretched his hand.

"Mikoto Yukio, a pleasure." Mikoto introduced himself as he shook the boy's hand.

"Oh, you're an Easterner?" The boy deduced as he smiled. "Well, I hope you enjoyed Galadriel."

"Thanks..." ("Didn't even mention my mask; eh, it must be too awkward.") Mikoto mentally shrugged while turning to the stage as the auditorium quieted down.

Silence was the only thing that followed as someone walked onto the stage. He was a tall, imposing man, looking to be in his late twenties or so. He had a head of spiky, long, dark blue hair with a sculpted face where two ocean blue eyes sat. He was dressed in what seemed like a blue military uniform. He took slow strides to the center stage as he came to a halt before turning to them. His sharp eyes seemed to scan each and every student like he was undressing their character.

"Headmaster Aleister, whoa..." Beside him, William looked at the apparent headmaster with no small amount of admiration, though many other students were following his example, and for good reason. The Headmaster was a formal general for the kingdom, and furthermore, he was a spawn of Aragorn, the same as the princess, not to mention he was an extremely powerful mage. Maybe one of the strongest person in the kingdom, the only other person being able to surpass his potential being the spawn of Octavia.

"I won't waste your time with a meaningless speech. As I have better things to do than talk to some brats." The man bluntly started, his voice traveling throughout the auditorium effortlessly. Of course magic was involved; when was it not? "Now, I'll only be saying a few things." The man started.

"If you're weak, then quit right now." Confusion and some level of anger were the extent of the expressions Mikoto saw. Some students must have been expecting some long winded speech from an academy this prestigious. Yet this man, this icon was only willing to offer a few words.

"No matter what you hear from others or what you might see, there's one truth in this world. Power is needed to succeed; whatever your plans are for the future, remember that you'll accomplish nothing while remaining weak. Power is everything." The man finished as he raised his right hand, snapping his fingers. A small radiating light appeared above each student before something took form and fell on their laps.

Mikoto picked up what he had identified as a piece of paper with something written on it.

("Wolf.") Mikoto could not help but tilt his head in confusion, an action that was noticed by William.

"Oh, right, you might not know how things function in Luminare Academy." He deduced.

"Yep, I've no clue about most things." He admitted sheepishly as the boy let out a slight chuckle.

"I suppose that is understandable, but I'd be happy to inform you." He offered, and Mikoto was grateful. Fiona only really told him a bit about the academy but never really went into detail about how things function in the academy.

"Thanks a bunch."

"No problem. Now you see these notes, we have separated us all into individual classes. Every class is named after an animal, or Astrothian. This is mostly so the professors have an easier time distinguishing each class." He explained as Mikoto hummed in interest. "See? We both got wolf, so we're classmates."

"I see. Is there any other purpose for this naming scheme?" It seemed too elaborate; would it not be easy to just number each class? In response, William sent him a sheepish smile as he spoke.

"Well, I don't personally know if it's true. But I heard that the Astrothian and animal names used were preferred by some of the faculty, and sometimes they put classes against each other." Mikoto could not see the purpose for that, but he supposed they had to have a way to keep students motivated. And what better way to have them beat the shit out of each other?

"It seems like something to look forward to in the future." William only chuckled at his words.

"With the kind of monsters that are in our year? I think not. But enough of that. Wanna go search for the class together?"

"Sure, let's."

And so his stay at the academy began.