

A Lesson in Magic

Lesson 2- Crying is allowed, but shouting for no reason is not.

I wake up on a hard wooden floor surrounded by strangers. My chest is still burning and I feel kind of light headed. My wrist aches and the room feels way too bright. I'm still struggling to breathe. Shit, where's my inhaler? I force myself to sit up and scramble around looking for my bag. Where is it? I panic when I can't find it which only makes my breathing worse. I look around wildly until I spot my bag. It's on a bench and the contents are scattered. Has someone been going through my stuff? Never mind that. I need my inhaler. I move to get up but I can't quite seem to manage it. I make eye contact with a red haired woman who is standing near my stuff.

"In- Inhal- I can't-" I try to force the words out. She stares at me in confusion, tilting her head as she tries to decipher what I'm saying. A deep voice behind me makes me jump.

"There's an inhaler with her things." The voice points out. The woman's eyes widen with understanding.

"Oh, damn. Sorry. I'll grab it for you." She squeaks out the words as if frightened. She grabs the inhaler and even the dodgy little spacer I keep with it and hands them both to me with a nervous, but kind smile.

It takes me a few attempts to take the medication, and another couple minutes after that until I get a decent amount of control over my breathing. No one tries to say anything to me, they just wait for me to pull myself together. My chest still aches, but I should be able to speak again at least.

"Thankyou." I tell the woman, relieved. She nods easily.

I take the chance to examine my surroundings. I'm in a small kitchen. It's tidy enough, although from my viewpoint on the floor I can see a bit of dirt under the small meal preparation area. The woman with red hair is watching me curiously, to her right is a rather rotund man in a white apron, he looks all the more rotund because he is very short, probably even shorter than me and I'm fairly average height for a woman. Is he the cook here maybe?

Is this a restaurant? No, the kitchen is way too small. I can smell alcohol too, so maybe a bar? The sound of music and voices is coming from somewhere on the

other side of this wall. A bar seems likely. I recall there was someone behind me, the owner of that deep voice.

I twist around to see who it came from.

Woah, kneeling on the floor a few feet away from me is the most terrifying man I have ever seen. Even kneeling I can tell that he's tall, and not just tall but with a very muscular build too. He has a handsome face but somehow that just makes him more intimidating. His expression is intimidating, is he glaring at me?

Or does he just have a serious case of resting bitch face? His eyes are dark and so is his hair. He has tanned skin and he's watching me as closely as I'm watching him. He looks like the kind of guy who could snap a person in two then walk away without a care in the world, but despite all that, I don't think I have it in me to be scared of him.

Maybe because he told that woman to give me my inhaler, maybe because he's kneeling down on the floor with me rather than standing over me like the other two are, or maybe it's just because I've hit my limit and I don't have it in me to be scared anymore. Honestly I feel kind of numb.

Also he's still watching me. I wonder what it is that he's seeing? A twenty seven year old woman who can't get up off the floor. My dark ponytail is messy and falling around my face, my wrist is bleeding and I can see smudges of dirt on my pink shirt. Also I think I'm missing a shoe. I'm probably staring at him with wide eyes. It's bright in here so he can probably see that they're a greenish colour rather than the brown they look like in the dark.

My eyes are probably the only thing I got from my father, I always thought I looked more like my mother. She was Japanese and moved here as a teenager. With my hair, skin tone and height I definitely take after her. At least I think I do. She passed away when I was little but my brother did show me some old photos and I swear I look just like her. Either way, I probably look like a mess. A worn out, wreck of a human being. Ugh.

I tear my eyes away from the intimidating man kneeling on the floor and glance back at the other two. They are both glancing between him and I as if they're waiting for something. I have no idea what. Am I supposed to say something? Well... That I can manage.

"Where am I?" I ask, directing the question at no one in particular. The redhead and the cook exchange glances then look back to the scary guy. Alright, he is clearly the one in charge here which doesn't really come as a surprise to me. I turn

to face him properly, crossing my legs and attempting to sit with a little dignity. I suppose it would be more dignified to get up off the floor but I'm not totally sure that I can manage it just yet. I fold my hands into my lap, mostly as a way to keep from fidgeting. The scary guy doesn't answer my question, instead he turns to the others.

"Fetch the first aid kit. Her wrist needs seeing to." He orders. The cook scrambles off in a hurry. No need to tell him twice. The scary guy continues watching me, and he still hasn't answered my question. He does however ask one of his own.

"What's your name?" His voice is quiet but demanding. Not the kind of person you question or argue with. Or rather not the kind of person that most people argue with. Still, he seems to be taking care of me so I'll answer him, even if he hasn't actually told me where I am yet.

"I'm Carina. Carina Akari. And you? What's your name?" I ask politely, there's no harm in being polite, right? He blinks at me and that's the only sign that what I've said gives him any pause. He answers slowly.

"You can call me Torin." He answers.

"Okay Torin. It's nice to meet you... I think." I reward him with a weak smile. The cook returns with a large first aid kit. Like it's almost comically large. What kinds of incidents are they preparing for with that? He places it on the floor next to me then glances back at the red head. She takes a half step forward.

"Should I?" She gestures at my injured wrist which has several large scratches on it that are still bleeding.

"No Laura. I'll take care of it." Torin answers. Ah, Laura, at least I'm starting to get some names to go with these faces. Wordlessly, he opens the first aid kit and starts disinfecting the cuts on my wrist. His hands are gentle despite the sting of the disinfectant.

"What happened? Where am I?" I try again.

"What do you remember?" Torin asks. I try to think back, my head is still aching.

"I was walking home from work. Someone was following me. I ran and got lost. I ended up in an alley and the man he was... There was something not right about him. I was banging on the door and screaming for help and... uh..." Flickering pieces of memory come back to me. I collapsed to the ground. There was a bright light as the door opened. Someone came rushing out, someone... No, it was Torin.

The wolf-man-creature tried to grab me but Torin stepped between us. The creature attacked and... and... I don't know what happened exactly. One second the creature was leaping at Torin and then he was being thrown across the alley and Torin was... different. Bigger, he... He had horns... And his eyes were black, not just the iris but the whole eye. He was... I don't know what he was. But he definitely isn't human.

“Carina? What else do you remember?” He pushes. All eyes in the room are on me as they wait to hear what I have to say. I turn back to Torin.

“You fought him off. I saw... I don't know exactly what I saw. Except... Are monsters real?”

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