

Fairy Tail 273

Chapter 273: The Next Step

After rescuing Erza and Marin, the group spent the next two days in the Edolas Gajeel's safe house. During that time, they had not heard from Happy and Carla at all. Meanwhile, the man hunt for them was still going strong.

On top of that, as time went by, keeping Natsu and Wendy calm was becoming more difficult. In fact, there were several times when Alfonzo had to physically restrain Natsu, who wanted to rush out and start looking for Happy. As for Wendy, there were several times when the female members of the group had to calm her down after she started crying due to her worry for Carla.

"*Sigh* Things finally look like they are calming down." The Edolas Gajeel said as he entered the rundown house that was serving as the group's hideout. "And even though I was never seen by the Royal Army, they made me one of their prime suspects for the lacrima's disappearance."

"Sorry for all the trouble." Elicia said. "But we're lucky to have you on our side."

"Don't worry about it." The Edolas Gajeel said, waving off Elicia's apology. "I believe this is the right thing to do. Just because the magic in Edolas is running out, what the royal family is doing is wrong."

"So, what's our next move?" Marin asked curiously. "I mean, we've talked about getting everyone out of that lacrima, but how are we gonna get back home?"

"I'm betting Mystogan should have away." Alfonzo replied, opening his eyes from his meditation.

Saying that Alfonzo was meditating was a bit inaccurate, however. Instead of meditating, he was circulating his magic power through the [Soul Weapon Embryo] he wore around his neck.

In fact, Alfonzo, Elicia, and Erza had all been spending most of their free time trying to cause their [Soul Weapons'] first shift. And although none of them felt that it would happen before they were able to solve the issues in Edolas, they knew it would not be too far off.

"*Sigh* I'm kinda jealous that I don't have a pendant like that, too." Marin said after catching a glimpse of the pendant under Alfonzo's shirt. "Having a weapon like that would be nice."

"Now that I think about it, do you even have your daggers?" Elicia asked curiously.

"*Sigh* No." Marin replied. "I was just relaxing with Erza at the guild hall when everything happened. But my daggers are back in my room at the mansion. We didn't even get to finish our conversation about the new novel we were reading. *Sigh*"

As she had mentioned to Wendy after returning from the quest to Karakura, Marin had moved into Alfonzo's house shortly after she returned. And naturally, all her belongings were moved along with her. Unfortunately, having not expected a situation like this, she was not carrying her daggers with her.

"Oh, I didn't think about that." Alfonzo said as he held his hands out in Marin's direction. In the next instant, a pair of daggers, nearly identical to Marin's main weapons, appeared in his hands. Then, he handed them to her with a smile on his face. "Here. I should have made a backup pair for you a long time ago."

Seeing the new pair of daggers in Alfonzo's hands, Marin sighed in relief. She did not like being in hostile territory without a way to protect herself, after all.

Accepting the new daggers, Marin, since she did not have sheaths for them, [Transformed] them into a pair of bracelets. Then, with a smile, she lunged forward and wrapped her arms around Alfonzo's neck.

"Thank you, Fonzie." Marin said happily before pecking Alfonzo on the cheek.

Seeing that display of affection, Wendy could not help but blush.

Although he was happy to see Marin smiling so brightly, Alfonzo could not help but twitch his upper lip when he was called "Fonzie." Even though he had gotten used to hearing Elicia and Cana call him that over the years, he never actually liked the nickname. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do to stop it.

"Those are permanent, right?" Elicia asked with a hint of concern in her voice.

"Yeah." Alfonzo replied with Marin still nuzzling up against him. "It wouldn't be a good look if they suddenly disappeared mid-battle, after all."

"What about the drain on your magic power?" Erza, who had also just ended her meditation, asked.

"Yeah, you said that making permanent objects uses up a lot more magic power, right?" Lucy asked, also showing concern.

Hearing the other three girls, Marin also just remembered about the extra magic power cost Alfonzo had to endure to make permanent objects.

"Don't worry about it." Alfonzo said, waving off their concerns. "Making a pair of daggers that size isn't an issue."

"Yeah, but what about their ability to change their weight and mass?" Marin asked.

"That has nothing to do with the materials needed to make them." Alfonzo replied while combing his fingers through Marin's hair. "And carving sigils into the daggers doesn't cost any extra magic power. So, there's nothing to worry about."

"Yeah, it's good that Marin has a way to protect herself, now." Natsu said impatiently. "So, can we talk about what we're gonna do next? We need to save Happy and Carla."

"Carla... I hope you're okay." Wendy muttered in a downcast tone.

Seeing Natsu and Wendy like this, the rest of the group felt sorry for them. Unfortunately, Happy and Carla were not on the top of the list of things to do at the moment.

"Before we do anything, we need to find a way to stop the royal family from stealing any more magic power from Earth Land." Alfonzo said. "I doubt they'll stop after only taking Magnolia."

"But what about happy and Carla!?" Natsu shouted indignantly.

"You should let me finish, Natsu." Alfonzo replied calmly.

Though he could see that Natsu was about to lose it, Alfonzo continued to explain what he thought was the best next step in an even tone.

"Of course, this will require us to infiltrate the Royal Castle." Alfonzo continued. "But I think it would be better to keep the number of people going in to a minimum."

"So, who do you think should go inside?" Erza asked with a solemn expression on her face.

"Lici, Erza, Marin, and Lucy." Alfonzo replied.

"Then what will you do?" Elicia asked curiously.

"I'll take Black Steel up to the big lacrima in the sky." Alfonzo replied as he glanced at Gajeel.

"Hell yeah!" Gajeel exclaimed. "I'd love to see the looks on their faces wen another one of their lacrima turns into something else."

In response, Alfonzo shook his head.

"We can't do that this time." Alfonzo said. "If we turn it back to normal here, the whole town and everyone living in it will show up on that island."

"That would cause mass panic among the people of Magnolia." Lucy said with an uncomfortable expression.

"Then, why are we going up there?" Gajeel asked.

"To make sure the royal family can't do anything to the lacrima." Alfonzo replied. "I wouldn't put it past those assholes to use the lacrima against us. I mean, they've probably already figured out who we are, after all. Especially after seeing Lici, Erza, and Marin the other day."

"I guess that makes sense." Gajeel muttered, a little unhappy now that he has to be on guard duty.

"Um..." Wendy hummed while raising her hand to get everyone's attention.

And Wendy succeeded, quickly gaining everyone's attention.

"What's up, Wendy?" Elicia asked gently.

"Um... What are Natsu and I supposed to do?" Wendy asked, her cheeks turning red with everyone staring at her. "I mean... you never... Um... said what you wanted us to do... Alfonzo..."

As she spoke, Wendy's voice lowered in volume as her head lowered along with it. Meanwhile, everyone who saw her behavior could not help thinking the same thing.

'She's so cute.'

"Yeah, what are we supposed to do?" Natsu asked energetically, looking forward to finally getting out of this little house.

Seeing Natsu and Wendy's enthusiasm, though Wendy's was hidden under her shyness, Alfonzo smiled at the both of them.

"Your task is to do the thing you want to do most right now." Alfonzo said, his smile widening. "Go and find Happy and Carla. The only condition is that the two of you have to stay together."

"Really?" Wendy asked, her head snapping up to meet eyes with Alfonzo.

"Oh yeah!" Natsu shouted. "I'm all fired up! Let's go, Wendy!""

After that loud shout, Natsu grabbed Wendy and slung her over his shoulder. Then, he rushed out of the house, kicking the door off the hinges as he left.

"My door..." The Edolas Gajeel muttered as he stared at his safe house's empty doorframe.

"*Sigh* Sorry about that, Gajeel." Alfonzo said as he shook his head at Natsu's actions. "I'll fix that before we leave. Meanwhile, the rest of you should get going, too."

In response, Elicia, Erza, Marin, and Lucy nodded their heads as they, too, left the safe house. Meanwhile, Alfonzo got up and walked to the door that was now laying in the middle of the street. Then, with his [Metal Magic], he repaired the broken hinges and reattached the door. He was just lucky that the door was only pulled away from the hinges instead of the hinges being pulled out of the wall.

"Thanks for that, Alfonzo." The Edolas Gajeel said in a relieved tone. "It would be hard to use this place as a safe house if there were no door, after all. Oh, and while you all are out, I'll do my best to run interference. I'll do what I can to keep the Royal Army off you, even if only for a little bit."

"Thanks." Alfonzo replied with a nod. "Then, we'll get going. Let's go, Black Steel."

Nodding in response, Gajeel followed Alfonzo out of the house. Then, Alfonzo bent the light around the two of them as he flew them up towards the landmass holding the giant lacrima.

A few minutes later, Elicia, Erza, Marin, and Lucy arrived outside the Royal Castle. And with Elicia's [Camouflage Magic], sneaking in undetected went smoothly.

"Now that we're inside, what's the plan?" Marin asked curiously.

"I think it would be in our best interest to split up." Erza replied. "Even though we're concealed with Elicia's magic, moving together in a group would make it easier to be found by the enemy."

"I agree." Elicia replied with a nod.

"then, how are we splitting up?" Lucy asked.

"You and Erza should go that way." Elicia said, pointing down a corridor. Then, she pointed in the opposite direction as she continued. "And Marin and I will go that way."

"Agreed." Erza replied with a nod. "Then, let's be off, Lucy."

"Okay." Lucy replied. Then, she looked at Elicia and Marin. And in a concerned tone, she continued. "You two be careful."

"We will." Marin replied with a smile.

"You two should be careful, too." Elicia added. "Remember, there are at least three Captains running around in the Castle right now. And I won't be able to keep my magic cast on you once we get too far away from each other."

"Don't worry, I'll make sure to protect Lucy." Erza said, thumping her fist against her chest plate.

Then, after exchanging a few more words, the four young women split into groups of two and began their search for a way to stop the king from using the Anima to absorb any more magic power from Earth Land.

At the same time, Natsu and Wendy were running around the streets of the Royal Capital.

"Happy~~~~! Carla~~~! Where are you~~~~!?" Natsu shouted at the top of his lungs.

"Um... Natsu... I don't think that's gonna work..." Wendy said hesitantly. "Alfonzo said Happy and Carla were taken to Extalia, remember?"

Immediately after hearing Wendy speak, Natsu, who was still carrying her on his shoulder, came to a sudden stop. Then, with his free hand, he started scratching the side of his head.

"Extalia? Where is that?" Natsu asked in a frustrated tone.

"I don't know." Wendy said, her mood becoming downcast once again. A moment later, however, she raised her head. "I bet the people in the city know, but---"

"That's it!" Natsu shouted happily. "We'll just ask the people around us!"

"Um... Natsu.. I don't think that's--- Kya!" Wendy said, trying to dissuade Natsu from asking the people.

Before she could stop him, however, Wendy screamed when Natsu took off running towards the nearest person.

"Hey!" Natsu shouted as he grabbed a nearby middle-aged man. "How do I get to Extalia?"

"Blasphemy!" The middle-aged man replied, flinging Natsu's hand off his clothing. "You dare to even consider visiting the home of the gods?"

While learning about this world from the Edolas Lucy, she explained that the Exceed were thought of as higher beings by most of Edolas' population due to the fact that they were the only beings who could naturally use magic. Though, it would seem that Natsu had forgotten, if he had even listened in the first place, about that in his panic to find Happy.

Not only the middle-aged man he grabbed, but all the other pedestrians on the street were now looking at Natsu as though he were some kind of sinner. There were even people who ran away to alert the Royal Army to his presence.

"I tried to tell you that wasn't a good idea." Wendy murmured.

Meanwhile, Natsu had already started running from the area. At the same time, he continued to shout for Happy and Carla, hoping they would hear him whenever they returned to the Royal Capital.