

Fairy Tail 371

Chapter 371: Tsunade's Bad Habits

The next morning, Alfonzo slowly opened his eyes. And the first thing he noticed after waking up was the soft body he was spooning from behind, acting as the big spoon. Seeing the head of blond hair, he could not help but smile.

'I have to admit, this happened a lot sooner than I expected.' Alfonzo mused as he began playing with Lucy's hair.

["Yeah, she seemed like the type to make you wait for it."] Bedlam replied from Alfonzo's inner world.

'I was thinking the same thing.' Alfonzo replied with a grin. 'But once she got started, she was pretty wild. Especially that little kink of hers. I've never been with someone who gets so excited just because I'm looking at her. But sex in front of the mirror was pretty fun.'

["More importantly, did you notice that Tsunade left this little town last night?"] Bedlam asked, and Alfonzo could tell he was grinning like the Cheshire Cat.

["Hmph! She was probably just going out to get her gambling fix."] Riot replied disdainfully. ["I wonder how much money she lost and how much debt she put her guild in."]

'Come on, Riot.' Alfonzo replied while smiling wryly. 'I'm sure she won't go too far. The guild has to pay me, after all.'

["You won't be that optimistic when she calls you into her office to tell you that the guild can't pay you."] Riot shot back.

Immediately, Alfonzo froze with a mixture of terror and suspicion on his face. Before he could reply, however, he felt Lucy begin to stir.

"Hmm... Good morning." Lucy said in a sleepy tone. "What time is it?"

"It's actually just about time for us to get up." Alfonzo replied, deciding to think about Tsunade's gambling habits later. "More importantly, how are you feeling?"

Hearing that, though Alfonzo could not see it from his position behind Lucy, he could tell she smiled. And rather brightly at that. However, when she tried to turn around in his arms, Lucy winced rather noticeably.

"I can't feel my legs and moving even a little causes pain to shoot through my lower body." Lucy replied in a disgruntled tone.

"That's gonna make it hard for you to meet the members of Mermaid Heel today." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile.

"And just whose fault do you think that is?" Lucy shouted as she turned around quickly. "Ow! It hurts so much."

'You were the one who told me not to worry about it last night.' Alfonzo thought while deciding to keep that thought to himself.

"I'm sorry." Alfonzo replied before pecking Lucy on the forehead. "You can just rest at home. I'll make you breakfast before I leave and I'll come back to make you lunch, too."

"Damn right, you will." Lucy replied, sounding rather satisfied with Alfonzo's response.

In response, Alfonzo smiled wryly. At the same time, he unwrapped his arms from around Lucy and sat up.

"Anyway, we should take a shower and change the bedding." Alfonzo said as he climbed out of bed. Then, once he was standing, he scooped Lucy up in a princess carry. "I'm sure you don't wanna laze around in bed with the bed smelling like love juice, right?"

"Kya!" Lucy yelped when she was suddenly lifted out of bed.

However, when she properly registered what Alfonzo said, she could not help but bury her face in his chest to hide her fiercely blushing face.

Although she had squirted before when masturbating, it was rare. But when having sex with Alfonzo last night, she squirted every time she orgasmed. As a result, the entire bed was covered in her juices. Luckily, both she and Alfonzo were tired enough after they were done to ignore that fact.

"Go to my room and get my keys." Lucy said in a muffled voice while still hiding her face in Alfonzo's chest.

"Huh? Do you need something from your truck?" Alfonzo asked in feigned confusion.

"Not those keys." Lucy replied as she raised her head and slapped Alfonzo on the shoulder. "My [Celestial Keys]."

After raising her head, Lucy immediately saw the teasing smile on Alfonzo's face. Then, she slapped him on the shoulder again while a pout made it onto her face.

"Stop teasing me." Lucy whined.

"Alright, alright." Alfonzo replied with a chuckle. "I'll stop."

With that, Alfonzo sat Lucy on the edge of the bed. Then, he quickly put on a pair of shorts and made his way to Lucy's bedroom. Along the way, he could hear Wendy and Carla chatting while the shower was running on the second floor, so he knew he was running out of time to get ready.

Quickly finding Lucy's [Celestial Keys], Alfonzo returned to the master bedroom. Then, once the door was closed, he handed the key pouch to Lucy.

Once the pouch was in her hands, Lucy wasted no time finding the key she wanted.

"[Open, Gate of the Maiden, Virgo]." Lucy chanted as she thrust the [Golden Celestial Key] in her hand into the empty space in front of her.

Then, with a turn of the key, a golden light flashed in front of the key. A moment later, the Celestial Spirit, Virgo appeared before curtsying towards Lucy with her head bowed.

"Good morning, Princess." Virgo said in greeting. "Have you call me to be punished?"

"No, of course not." Lucy replied in an exasperated tone.

Hearing the expected response, Virgo raised her head without letting her disappointment show. However, when she saw that Lucy was completely nude, her eyes widened in surprise.

"Princess, have you called me to sate your sexual urges?" Virgo asked with her eyes shining.

"*Sigh* Why are you always like this, Virgo?" Lucy asked while massaging her temples.

"At least, she's consistent." Alfonzo said while stifling a chuckle.

"Now is not the time, Alfonzo." Lucy said with frustration in her tone.

With that, Virgo finally realized that Lucy was not alone when she summoned her. So, very politely, she turned to Alfonzo, and once again, she curtsied while bowing her head.

"Ah, and a good morning to you, as well, Master Alfonzo." Virgo said politely.

"Come on, Virgo." Alfonzo said while smiling wryly. "How many times have I told you not to be so formal?"

"My apologies." Virgo replied. A moment later, she raised her head with expectation shining in her eyes once again. "Perhaps you would like to punish me for my oversight?"

In response, Alfonzo could only continue smiling wryly.

"Alright, that's enough, Virgo." Lucy said. "I need you to change the bedding in here while Alfonzo and I take a shower."

"Understood, Princess." Virgo replied with a bow. "Would you like my assistance in the bathroom?"

"No, that's not necessary." Lucy replied as she waved off Virgo's offer. "Just get the room cleaned up. And when Alfonzo, Wendy, and Carla leave, go with them and look after Wendy and Carla."

"As you wish, Princess." Virgo replied.

With that, Alfonzo picked up Lucy once again. Then, he carried her into the bathroom while Virgo got to work cleaning the bedroom.

At the same time, Tsunade, after a night of drinking and gambling, returned to the guild. And upon opening the guild hall's doors, she looked around the guild hall cautiously. Then, after not seeing the person she was afraid to see. She stepped inside.

With the coast clear, Tsunade quickly walked through the main hall and made her way to the stairs before climbing them without saying a word to any of her wizards.

Meanwhile, the ladies of Mermaid Heel watched her in exasperation.

"*Sigh* Master is at it again." Risley Law, a chubby, tan-skinned young woman appearing to be eighteen or nineteen years old with curly black hair, black eyes, and wearing clothing reminiscent of Polynesian attire consisting of a blue loincloth, with white accents and the Mermaid Heel emblem at its center, and a matching sleeveless top that exposed her midriff, said quietly after Tsunade disappeared up the stairs.

"Looks that way." Araña replied. "Sometimes I'm amazed that we haven't gone bankrupt yet."

"What do you mean?" Beth Vanderwood, a ten year old little girl with orangish-brown hair tied into two braided pigtails on either side of her head, very large, almost round, greyish-blue eyes, and freckled cheeks wearing a black, short-sleeve t-shirt under a pair of blue denim overalls and a pair of sandals, asked in a tone mixed with curiosity and innocence.

"You're still a little too young to be worrying about that kind of stuff, Beth." Risley said as she patted Beth on the head.

In response, Beth wore an adorable pout after being treated like the child she was.

"I'm sure Master knows not to go overboard." Kagura said in an emotionless tone. "We still have to pay Alfonzo for the new training facilities, after all."

"Yeah, and Alfie won't be happy if we can't pay him., meow." Millianna said with a shiver while remembering how badly Alfonzo beat up Jellal during the Tower of Heaven incident.

"Ooh!" Beth exclaimed as her eyes lit up. "Is that Alfonzo guy strong?"

Not only Beth, but Arana and Risley looked at Kagura and Millianna in interest, too.

"Well, I've only seen him fight once, meow." Millianna replied. "But from what I could see, he was really strong."

"Back when I went on that joint quest with Yoruichi, Alfonzo took on and defeated the two most powerful S-Class wizards we were sent to bring in."

While Arana, Risley, and Beth were listening to Millianna and Kagura talk about Alfonzo, Anko, who was sitting at the bar had also watched Tsunade enter the guild hall.

"I heard that Lady Tsunade left the Village Hidden in the Leaves because she lost her little brother and fiancé in the second Great Ninja War." Anko muttered to herself while staring blankly at the guild hall's staircase. "And that's when she started gambling and drinking so heavily."

Anko stopped her quiet monologue when a waitress brought over the breakfast she ordered. Then, after thanking the waitress and giving her a tip, she continued once the waitress walked away.

"Then, while traveling around Ishgar with Shizune, she ran into Master Unohana, who invited her into the guild." Anko continued while cutting the food on her plate. "And while she was a member of the guild, she slowly overcame her trauma. Hell, she even became the guild master. But she still over does it with the gambling and alcohol, every once in a while."

Getting to that point, Anko could only shake her head. Then, she decided to drop the matter and focus on eating breakfast before she started training.

Meanwhile, Tsunade had just arrived at the door to her office.

"*Sigh* I made it here without running into Master Ritsu." Tsunade said in a relieved tone as she opened the door to her office. "Now, I just have to figure out how to get back the money to pay the kid with and... everything... will... be... Aww, shit..."

As she took a step into her office, Tsunade's words trailed off while her face, which was flushed from a night of heavy drinking, paled rapidly as she noticed Ritsu, who was sitting in front of her desk with a cup of tea in her hands, smiling at her gently.

"Though you may be a skilled shinobi, Tsunade, did you really think I wouldn't notice when you snuck out last night?" Ritsu asked while maintaining her gentle smile.

Although Ritsu's smile was very gentle, the pressure it was putting on Tsunade was immense. In fact, it was to the point that Tsunade could feel herself sobering up in real-time. Most likely due to the fact that she was sweating out all the alcohol that was still in her bloodstream.

"Master Ritsu, good morning." Tsunade said with an awkward smile on her face. "You see... I was just..."

"And what was that you said about 'getting back the money to pay the kid?'" Ritsu asked, her smile becoming even more gentle while the pressure she was emitting increased proportionally. "Surely, you're not going to tell me that you gambled away the money for the work we commissioned, are you?"

"Um.. Well... You see.. There's an explanation for this..." Tsunade stammered out as her sweat started to drench her back.

"It would seem you need more discipline." Ritsu continued, not paying attention to anything Tsunade had to say. "Every evening after you finish your training with Wendy, you and I will train together until we've instilled the value of discipline within you."

'Holy shit...' Tsunade muttered internally as her expression was slowly filled with terror. 'She might actually kill me this time. '

However, when she remembered that Ritsu was a healer that was on par, if not surpassing her, Tsunade's expression was filled with terror in an instant.

'Even if she does kill me, I'm sure she'd be able to find a way to bring me back.' Tsunade thought as her face turned deathly pale.

"As for the money we have to pay Alfonzo, I'll take care of that." Ritsu said after taking a sip from her teacup. "But you will repay it."

"Yes, Ma'am." Tsunade replied with her back straight.

"Also, you will repay the guild for the money you lost." Ritsu added.

"Understood." Tsunade replied.

'Only if I live through your training, though.' Tsunade thought while fearing for her life.

Chapter 372: Walking into a Trap

Deciding she was not comfortable with being alone with Ritsu right now, Tsunade made her way back down to the first floor of the guild. Unfortunately for her, Ritsu decided to follow her. However, there was nothing she could do about that.

"Alfonzo, Wendy, and Carla should be here soon." Tsunade said as she stepped onto the first floor. "And according to Anko, they should be bringing Marin's replacement, Lucy Heartfilia, along with them to meet the members of our guild she hasn't met."

"Hopefully she'll be able to get along with the girls in our guild." Ritsu replied. "Luckily, Marin seemed to be very outgoing and was able to fit in with them quite easily."

"Yeah, I hope so, too." Tsunade said with a nod of agreement.

A few moments later, after Tsunade and Ritsu took a seat, the doors to the guild were opened. Standing in the doorway were Alfonzo, Wendy, Carla, and a young woman that no one recognized.

"That's not Lucy." Tsunade said with a slight frown.

"No, it's not." Ritsu replied with a gentle smile. Though, her aura was starting to turn dangerous.

As soon as Ritsu's aura changed, Alfonzo's head snapped in her direction with a wry smile on his face.

'Yeah, bringing an unfamiliar person with as much magic power as Virgo into another guild's guild hall without prior notice was probably a bad idea.' Alfonzo thought as he led the rest of his group towards Tsunade and Ritsu. 'But it's not my fault Lucy couldn't walk today.'

["Actually, it kinda is."] Bedlam replied.

["Yup, definitely is."] Riot added.

'Okay, fine. It may be partially my fault, but still...' Alfonzo replied while shrugging mentally. 'Still, since she came with us, there shouldn't be any reason to react like that, right?'

As Alfonzo's thoughts reached that point, he and the rest of the group arrived next to the table where Tsunade and Ritsu sat.

"Good morning, Master Tsunade, Master Unohana." Alfonzo said in a friendly tone. "How are you this morning?"

"Good morning, Master Tsunade, Master Unohana." Wendy and Carla greeted in unison.

"Good morning, you three." Tsunade replied casually. Then, she narrowed her eyes at Alfonzo as she continued. "So, would you mind introducing the new face? She's not the one you informed us about, after all."

"Sure." Alfonzo replied casually. "She's only here because Lucy isn't feeling well today. This is Virgo, one of the Celestial Spirits Lucy has a contract with."

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Master Tsunade, Master Unohana." Virgo said with a courtesy. "As Master Alfonzo said, I am a Celestial Spirit contracted to Princess Lucy Heartfilia."

"I see." Ritsa said as she retracted her pressure. "So, that girl Lucy was a [Celestial Spirit Wizard], huh? They are quite rare. I guess she is following in the footsteps of her mother."

"Anyway, like I said, Virgo will be here to take care of Wendy today because Lucy isn't feeling well." Alfonzo reiterated. "She should probably be here tomorrow, though."

"Very well." Tsunade said. "Well, now that the introductions are out of the way, Wendy, come with me. We'll start with sparring today. After that, we'll start our practical training in regard to healing."

'Does that mean she'll be doing the same stuff she had Sakura do in the anime?' Alfonzo thought to himself. 'Like the shit with bringing the fish back to life?'

["That's not important right now."] Bedlam said, cutting off Alfonzo's train of thought. ["That woman looks so nervous that her breasts shrank by a cup size."]

Ignoring the part about her breasts shrinking, Alfonzo's gaze focused on Tsunade's face. And just as Bedlam said, although she was trying to hide it, Alfonzo could see in her micro-expressions that she was indeed nervous.

'Reading that book about reading people's expressions from the miscellaneous section in the guild's library was a good idea.' Alfonzo thought as his eyes narrowed. 'This is a skill I would have never been able to pick up in my past life.'

Meanwhile, upon feeling Alfonzo's gaze, Tsunade's nervousness grew. A moment later, however, she relaxed.

'Why am I so nervous?' Tsunade asked herself. 'Master Ritsu said she would take care of the payment, didn't she?'

A moment later, however, Tsunade's nerves returned in full force.

'But in return, I'll have to pay both her and the guild back.' Tsunade thought to herself as her face paled slightly. And as her thoughts continued, her face paled even further. 'On top of that, I'll have to train with her every night until she's satisfied with the discipline I've cultivated. What the hell does that even mean, anyway?'

'What the hell is wrong with her?' Alfonzo asked himself. 'At first, she seemed nervous. Then, when I glared at her, she got even more nervous. A moment later, she completely relaxed, though. And after that she got all afraid.'

["Maybe she drank too much."] Bedlam replied, sounding just as confused as Alfonzo.

["Who cares?"] Riot asked in an irritated tone. ["You just better hope she didn't gamble away all the money they were supposed to pay you."]

'Come on, Cuzz. Stop saying shit like that.' Alfonzo replied. 'You're raising flags, and I don't like it.'

If Alfonzo had known that Riot's words were correct, he would be handling this situation differently. Lucky for him, however, he had no idea. On top of that, he really wanted to believe in Tsunade. So, he was trying his best to push all Riot's speculations to the back of his mind.

Shaking his head to rid himself of the negative thoughts, Alfonzo patted Wendy on her head.

"Alright, Wendy. Work hard, and I'll see you after I finish working." Alfonzo said with a smile.

"Okay." Wendy replied while clenching her fists in front of her chest. "I won't let you and the guild down."

Hearing that, Alfonzo smiled brightly while Wendy, Carla, and Virgo followed Tsunade out to the training field.

Meanwhile, Ritsu watched the entire exchange with an amused smile on her face.

'It looks like Alfonzo must have known that Tsunade left the headquarters last night.' Ritsu mused. 'And considering that he had already gambled with Tsunade before and seen her abysmal talent, he probably

guessed that she gambled away his money. Luckily, I've decided to take responsibility to not tarnish the guild's honor. I really didn't want anything to happen that could sour relations between our guilds any further after the mess Yoruichi caused.'

"Well..." Ritsu said as she stood from her seat. "I think we should get going, too. There's still a lot of work for you to do, right, Alfonzo?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right." Alfonzo replied as Ritsu's words pulled his attention away from Tsunade. "Let's go."

"Let's." Ritsu replied with a gentle smile. "And since you said Lucy isn't feeling well today, I would assume you plan to visit and check on her at some point during the day, correct."

"That's right." Alfonzo replied with a nod as he turned towards his work site. "When I break for lunch, I'll go check on her and make her something to eat."

"Well then, perhaps I should accompany you." Ritsu said, her gentle smile turning slightly mischievous. "I'm a pretty good healer in my own right, you know. Perhaps I could help her recover."

Hearing that, Alfonzo's eyes widened in surprise. Although he knew what Ritsu said was true, he could not let her see Lucy. Even though she could definitely help Lucy recover faster with her [Healing Kido].

"That won't be necessary, Master Unohana." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "It's only fatigue from that long drive she made yesterday. She said that was the first time she had ever driven that far. So, she just needs some time to rest."

'Now that I think about it, how does [Healing Kido] even work in this world?' Alfonzo wondered as he and Ritsu walked side by side. 'I mean, in Bleach, it was used to help restore spiritual power, which basically constituted a Soul Reaper's body. And with that, it would heal wounds... At least, I think that's how it worked. But let's assume it worked on the same principals in this world, restoring someone's magic power doesn't automatically heal their body.'

["Why do you even care?"] Riot asked in an irritated tone. ["As long as they can patch up an unwanted hole, does it really fucking matter?"]

["He's right, you know."] Bedlam added. ["Does the principal even matter?"]

'Fuck off, you two.' Alfonzo replied. 'I was just curious. It's not like I was gonna dive in to all the details.'

"I see." Ritsu replied with a knowing smile. "Well, you should take good care of her, then. And tell her not to overdo it."

In response, Alfonzo turned his head to give Ritsu a reply. However, when he saw her smile, his own smile cramped slightly.

'Fuck, she knows.' Alfonzo thought to himself. 'What am I talking about, of course she knows. It's not like none of the girls talked about their sex lives during the time she and the other four visited the guild. And there's no way they didn't hear them. It's not like they're as quiet as they think they are when they start their girl talk.'

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Shirotsume.

While Alfonzo and Wendy were getting to work for the day, Marin was walking out of town with the crew from Sorcerer Weekly for her photo shoot. And like most Fairy Tail wizards do while outside of Magnolia, she had her [Magic Power Detection] spread to monitor her surroundings. However, that's when she realized something was off about the newly hired make-up artist.

'That woman doesn't have a magic power signature. Marin thought to herself as she glanced at the make-up artist. 'I remember Fonzie telling us all to be careful about that. But for some reason, I can't remember why.'

While trying to remember what Alfonzo and Elicia told her about those without magic power signatures, she heard a voice in her head.

["Seriously, I'm starting to really think you're a moron."] An androgynous voice said from Marin's inner world. ["How do you forget something so important? Especially something that Fonzie told you?"]

"Whoa!" Marin exclaimed as she stumbled over her feet.

Naturally, that caused all the Sorcerer Weekly personnel to look in her direction.

"Sorry, sorry, I just lost my balance." Marin replied to the questioning stares.

'Hey, are you my [Armament Spirit]?' Marin replied excitedly. 'But I thought Fonzie said I probably wouldn't be able to hear you for a few more months.'

["You really don't listen to him when he says anything, do you?"] The [Armament Spirit] replied disdainfully. ["Seriously, you should stop everything when he starts talking."]

'OMG! You're just like his [Armament Spirit], Riot.' Marin replied. 'You're made from my feelings for Fonzie. Then, bumped up a few notches, right?'

["So? That doesn't change the fact that you should listen more closely."] The Armament Spirit reiterated. ["He said you should be able to hear my voice BY the end of the summer. Not AT the end of the summer."]

'Yeah, I know that.' Marin replied. 'But I just changed you from an [Embryo] last month. ['Not even Fonzie heard his [Spirit's] voices that fast.'

["So what?"] The [Armament Spirit] asked. ["You're not Fonzie. Besides, he already told you, stop comparing yourself to everyone else. You're you, and you'll do things at your own pace."]

'Yeah, I guess you're right.' Marin replied with realization in her tone. 'Anyway, what did Alfonzo say about people with no magic power signatures.'

["He said you should be careful because only homunculi have no magic power signature."] The [Armament Spirit] replied in a solemn tone. ["In other words, they somehow knew you would be here. This is definitely a trap."]

Hearing that, it took all of Marin's will power to not let her eyes widen in surprise. She did, however, make the best possible choice in her current situation. Pretending to adjust one of the bracelets she was wearing, Marin injected a tiny amount of magic power into a crystal, which happened to be a lacrima, before continuing forward as if nothing happened.

The lacrima on Marin's bracelet was not just any lacrima. In fact, it was a communications lacrima. Though, it was not like other communications lacrima. Since its only function was to inform the lacrima connected to it of the sender's location. Meaning, it worked well as an emergency beacon.

Eventually, Marin and the Sorcerer Weekly crew reached their desired location for the shoot. And immediately, the photo team got to work setting up the necessary tents, umbrellas, and other things necessary for a successful photo shoot. And the make-up tent was one of the first tents they got set up.

"Alright, Miss Kitagawa, let's go and get you made up." The make-up artist, Lust in disguise, said with a smile. "By the time I'm done, the changing tent should be ready, as well."

Marin, however, did not move to follow Lust, which caused Lust to look at her in feigned confusion while the rest of the crew who noticed looked at her with genuine confusion.

Instead, Marin stood in place with her arms crossed while glaring at Lust. At the same time, she had placed herself between the homunculus and the rest of the crew.

"Miss Kitagawa, is there something wrong?" Lust asked.

"You can drop the act, homunculus." Marin said sternly as she separated her arms slowly. "Do you really think I had no idea who you are? You tried to kill Lici not that long ago, after all."

["Hmph!"] Marin's [Armament Spirit] Snorted. ["I was the one who knew who she was. You couldn't even remember why you should be wary, remember?"]

'Now's not the time for that.' Marin replied internally while continuing to glare at Lust.

At the same time, when Marin slid her arms apart, she hooked her fingers around the bracelets on her wrists. Then, they transformed into the two daggers Alfonzo created for her as she took her fighting stance.

["And why the hell aren't you using me?"] The [Armament Spirit] asked, sounding a bit jealous. ["Even though Fonzie created those, too. I'm better in every conceivable way."]

"Miss Kitagawa, what are you talking about?" The photographer for this photo shoot, a middle-aged man with slicked back dark green hair and a perpetually lecherous gaze, asked angrily. "Just because she's a new hire, doesn't mean I'll allow you to bully her like that."

In fact, the only reason Lust was able to join the crew of this particular photo shoot was because she seduced the photographer. Which did not take much effort. This photographer was well known for playing "the game" in the entertainment industry. His only saving graces were the fact that he was an amazing photographer and that he always kept his promises to the young women he slept with.

"*Sigh* Even though it's a little earlier than I had hoped, it would seem my identity has been revealed." Lust said with a malicious grin. "If you had just come with me obediently, no one else would have had to die. Unfortunately, you decided all their fates."

Hearing that, the rest of the crew was completely dumbfounded. Marin, on the other hand, did not reply. Instead, she pointed her daggers at Lust in preparation for the inevitable clash.

Chapter 373: A Desperate Situation

Although Marin took her fighting stance after Lust admitted to her accusations, her first thought was actually to do something different. Instead of fighting immediately, she wanted to run away and put some distance between the Sorcerer Weekly crew and the battle. Unfortunately, she doubted that Lust would allow that.

"It looks like you've already realized it." Lust said, her malicious smile widening. At the same time, she pointed a finger at Marin as she continued. "I know Fairy Tail's reputation. Although it was liable to cause large amounts of property damage in the past, they always tried to keep civilian casualties to a minimum. So, unless you want all these people to end up like him, I would suggest you surrender."

As she neared the end of her speech, Lust's finger that was pointing at Marin, slowly shifted to the crew's photographer. And when she saw that, Marin's eyes opened wide as she started channeling magic power into her daggers.

'Please make it.' Marin thought as she increased the weight of her daggers to the limit that she could handle.

In the next instant, Lust's fingernail sharpened as it extended at high speed towards the photographer's forehead.

"[Transformation Magic: Shoot to Kill]." Marin chanted simultaneously.

With Marin's chant, the blades of her daggers extended at an even higher speed. At the same time, she blunted the tips of her daggers, as well.

Bang!

An instant before Lust's [Ultimate Spear] could penetrate the photographer's head, Marin's daggers impacted Lust's chest, causing her to slide backwards along with the blades of Marin's daggers.

"Gah!" Lust grunted as the wind was knocked out of her.

At the same time, after realizing just how close to death he was, the photographer's legs gave out and he fell to the ground while a wet patch appeared on the crotch of his pants.

"All of you need to get out of here, now!" Marin shouted as she retracted her daggers after they could not be extended any further without the fear of being easily broken. "She won't be gone for long!"

Hearing Marin's shout, the photo shoot crew finally snapped back to their senses. Then, without caring for any of the supplies they brought out to the shoot's location, they turned back towards Shirotsume Town and ran as fast as they could.

"Hey, someone help me!" The photographer shouted in a panic. "I can't move my legs! Don't leave me behind! Please!"

Hearing that, most of the crew continued to run. However, a few men and women, with comparatively kinder hearts, hesitated for a moment before eventually coming back to help the photographer escape as well.

Seeing that everyone had escaped, Marin could not help but sigh in relief.

["Don't drop your guard too early, she'll be back soon."] Marin's [Armament Spirit] warned.

"I know." Marin replied as she took a deep breath to prepare for battle.

A few moments later, after a tense silence, Marin shifted her body slightly to the left while swiping up with the dagger in her right hand to parry an incoming attack.

"It looks like I under estimated you." Lust said as she returned. "Even so, you have no chance of escaping. And once I've captured you, I'll make sure to slaughter all those insignificant insects you allowed to escape."

"Yeah, I don't think so." Marin replied before dashing forward.

While running, Marin tossed the dagger in her left hand into the air.

"[Dagger Magic: Flying Dagger Barrage]." Marin chanted.

In the next instant, eleven copies of the dagger she just threw into the air were created with Marin's magic power. Then, the eleven copies were all sent flying towards lust. Meanwhile, the original dagger fell back into Marin's outstretched hand.

"You expect to defeat me with such petty tricks?" Lust asked disdainfully.

A moment later, just as the daggers were about to pierce through her body, Lust extended the nails on both hands before rapidly slashing them at the incoming daggers.

Clang! *Clang!* *Clang!* * Clang!* *Clang!*

As a result, all eleven copies were deflected before dispersing into magic power.

At the same time, Marin had drawn closer to Lust. Then, once she was within range, she slashed the dagger in her right hand at Lust's neck.

Clang!

Unfortunately, Lust was able to easily defend herself. Yet, Marin's offensive did not stop.

"Transformation Magic: Claws and Fangs of Violation]." Marin chanted as she stepped back.

In the next instant, though she was clearly out of range, Marin slashed the dagger in her left hand diagonally upwards from Lust's right waist. At the same time, the blade of the dagger elongated.

"Clang!*

Still, just like with all the previous attacks, Lust was able to block it with her [Ultimate Spear].

"This is pointless." Lust said with a frown. "Just give up. If you do, you'll make it out of this without being hurt too badly."

Naturally, Marin ignored Lust's advice. Instead, she danced around Lust while continuing to alter her distance, and continuously slashed her daggers.

"Even if you were to give up, however, I'll still have to punish you for causing me so much trouble." Lust said as she swiped her arms outward to parry a pair of incoming slashes. "Maybe I'll leave a scar on that pretty face of yours. I wonder if that man of yours will still love you when he sees your new look."

As soon as she finished speaking, Lust's expression changed. Instead of parrying Marin's simultaneous downward slashes, her arms flailed ineffectively.

"Damn it..." Lust muttered as she saw the killer instinct in Marin's eyes as she pointed her daggers at her chest again.

"[Transformation Magic: Shoot to Kill]." Marin chanted.

Then, her daggers extended towards Lust's chest once again. Unlike the last time, however, Marin did not blunt their tips. As a result, the two daggers pierced through Lust's chest, skewering both of her lungs and her heart. Yet, Marin was not done with her offensive.

"[Transformation Magic: Bloom]." Marin chanted while her blades were still impaling her opponent.

In the next instant, several blades sprung out from all over Lust's torso, neck, and head. Then, without mercy, Marin swung her arms outwards, ripping Lust into chunks of flesh. On top of that, a glowing red Philosopher's Stone fell to the ground, as well.

["She's not dead."] Marin's [Armament Spirit] warned. ["Those things can regenerate as long as their stone is still intact."]

"I know." Marin replied as she threw the dagger in her left hand at the Philosopher's Stone.

Then, as soon as the dagger made contact with the Philosopher's Stone, it transformed into a metal case that enveloped the stone.

"There, that should take care of her until I can get this to Alfonzo and have him send it into space like the other one." Marin said with a smile. "My daggers may not be made of adamantite, but orichalcum isn't easy to cut through, either."

["I feel like you just raised a flag."] The [Armament Spirit] replied.

"Huh? Really?" Marin asked in disbelief.

As if to answer her question, one of Lust's fingernails punched through the orichalcum box holding the Philosopher's stone and shot towards Marin's abdomen.

"Seriously?" Marin exclaimed as she dove out of the way. "She ripped through it that easily? No, wait? How did she even do that? There shouldn't be enough room in there for her to regenerate at all."

["That's not really the important thing right now."] The [Armament Spirit] replied. ["You need to figure out how you're gonna get out of this in one piece."]

In the next instant, the extended fingernail sliced upward, bisecting the orichalcum box in the process. A moment later, Lust had completely regenerated.

"She doesn't look very happy." Marin said with a wry smile.

"Just a scar on your face will be the least of your worries." Lust said, ironically, with wrath in her tone. "My only order was to capture you alive. Other than that, the state of your body is irrelevant."

Then, without giving Marin the chance to respond, Lust dashed forward with her nails extended.

"This is bad." Marin muttered with an unprecedented level of focus.

At the same time, Marin reached for the choker around her neck. Then, as she pulled on it, it [Transformed] into her [Soul Armament], a long dagger with a slightly curved blade.

Just as the [Transformation] of her [Soul Armament] was completed, Lust was right in front of Marin with her right hand swinging at her face.

Reacting quickly, Marin parried Lust's slash with her [Sol Armament]. Then, she made a quarter turn to avoid Lust's follow-up thrust. Following that, she used the dagger in her right hand to parry another thrust.

Shing!

Unfortunately, unlike before, Lust's nails cut right through the dagger, dividing its blade into a few pieces that fell to the ground.

'Shit!' Marin exclaimed internally as she frantically dodged the incoming slash.

Unfortunately, that resulted in her arm being slashed, leaving a pair of bloody gashes across her bicep. Even so, Lust did not slow down her assault, hellbent on maiming her prey.

Despite the pain from her injury, Marin managed to duck under another slash. Then, she lunged forward and buried her [Soul Armament] into Lust's chest, its tip coming into contact with the Philosopher's Stone.

"Gya~~~~~!" Lust screamed in pain as she staggered backwards.

Taking advantage of the break in the action, Marin leapt backwards. Then, she used her [Soul Armament] to cut off a strip from the bottom of her shirt.

'I hope Lici will forgive me for ruining one of her pieces given the situation.' Marin said as she began wrapping the cut cloth around the wound on her arm.

["Yeah, I think she'll forgive you in this case."] The [Armament Spirit] replied.

'More importantly, do you know what happened just now?' Marin asked, never taking her eyes off of Lust. 'That's the first time she's had such a big reaction. On top of that, she's regenerating much slower, too.'

['It probably has something to do with the fact that I was made from a piece of your soul.'] The [Armament Spirit] replied. ['I think some of the souls trapped in the [Philosopher's Stone] were released. But without the proper procedure, they won't pass on. They'll just end up as wandering souls.']

'Bickslow would be happy if he was here.' Marin replied as she tied off her makeshift bandage.

['If he survived to use them.'] The [Armament Spirit] replied.

Around the same time, Lust finally finished regenerating her injuries. On top of that, she looked even angrier than when Marin ripped her body into pieces.

'I don't think she's concerned with bringing me in alive anymore.' Marin muttered internally after seeing the murderous look in Lust's eyes.

Then, as if to prove her right, Lust extended the nails on her right hand at Marin's chest. And if Marin did nothing to avoid them, at least two of them would puncture her heart.

Reacting quickly, Marin swept the nails aside with her [Soul Armament], which was completely undamaged after doing so. Then, she dodged to her left to avoid the incoming slash from Lust's other hand.

'Damn it, now she's keeping her distance.' Marin complained internally. 'Not that I couldn't hit her from here. But she'd definitely be able to avoid having her Philosopher's Stone getting hit again. On top of that, because Fonzie couldn't carve sigils into my [Soul Armament], it's dangerous to extend its blade too far. Since I can't change its mass.'

["You have to stay focused, Marin"] The [Armament Spirit] scolded.

Unfortunately, Marin was finding it hard to follow that piece of advice. Due to her injury, she was losing blood quickly. As a result, her mind was wandering while her body was reacting slower over time. And that eventually led to Marin being painted into a corner.

'Oh no!' Marin exclaimed internally as she staggered after parrying another slash.

Not missing the opportunity, Lust smiled viciously as she thrust her nails towards Marin's waist, intending to damage her inner organs while simultaneously severing her spine.

'I can't avoid this.' Marin thought to herself while trying to force her body to move away from the incoming attack.

Just as that thought passed through Marin's mind, she found herself in a strange place. Although it looked like a city scape, the buildings in her surroundings were changing shape. For example, one moment the building on her left was a quaint, two-story home. A moment later, it turned into a fifty-story skyscraper only to change into an equipment shed after another moment.

The buildings were not the only strange thing about the place she found herself in, either. Marin also noticed that the sky changed quite frequently, as well. One moment it would be blue without a cloud in sight. Then, it would be covered in storm clouds before turning into a nights sky. At one point, Marin even saw that the sky had turned blood red for a moment.

Even the ground constantly shifted between terrains, as well.

"Where am I?" Marin asked in wonder.

"This is your inner world." The androgynous voice Marin recognized as her [Armament Spirit] replied.

"I see." Marin replied while looking around. "Erza said something about this when she was fighting the chief of that flock of Crow Tengu. That means you brought me here right before it was too late, right?"

"That's right." The [Armament Spirit] replied.

"But where are you?" Marin asked while continuing to look around.

A moment later, the sky lit up like a super nova had gone off in the distance. Then, all the light from the explosion began to coalesce into a humanoid form floating above the changing cityscape.

"We don't have much time." The [Armament Spirit] said after its body, a petite, female body with androgynous facial features, a pair of glowing, multi-colored eyes, chalk-white skin, constantly changing, multi-colored, shoulder-length hair, and wearing a form-fitting, black and white body suit, said as it lowered its self to the ground. "Even though you were able to hear my voice, you're not yet ready to hear my name. So, we'll have to do something a bit different to save you from the predicament you're in."

Hearing that, Marin's focus heightened. Meanwhile, the [Armament Spirit] spread its arms wide.

"Somewhere in this city that is changing to display your emotional instability, there are an uncountable number of replicas of my weapon form." The [Armament Spirit] explained. "And among those replicas, the real me is hidden. And you only have one chance to find my real weapon form. Otherwise, at the very best, you will be captured and lose the use of everything below your waist."

In response, Marin's eyes widened in surprise.

"Just remember, like Fonzie said, we are of one soul." The [Armament Spirit] continued. "You must let our connection guide you to find the real me."

With that, the [Armament Spirit's] body broke down into motes of light that dispersed into the air.

Chapter 374: Bend All Creation to My Will

Cloaked in violet lightning, Alfonzo was flying at full speed towards the position where Marin's emergency communication originated.

"What the fuck happened?" Alfonzo asked in agitation as he cut through the air at roughly three times the speed of sound. "What kind of trouble could have come from taking a modelling job?"

["Calm down, Alfonzo."] Bedlam said from Alfonzo's inner world. ["At this rate, you won't have any magic power left when you get to her."]

"Yeah, and if I slow down, she might not even be alive when I fucking get there." Alfonzo shot back in a tone filled with irritation.

["That's right, Bedlam, leave him be this time."] Riot growled. ["We'll show whoever it is the price of messing with one of our women!"]

A few minutes ago, Alfonzo received Marin's emergency signal while he was working on the wiring for the first of the training facilities at the Mermaid Heel HQ. And when the signal came through, he actually lost control of his magic power for a moment due to his surge in emotion. As a result, he actually crushed the entire training room into the size of a shoe box with his [Metal Magic]. Luckily, both he and Ritsu were outside of the room when that happened.

After that, Alfonzo told Ritsu that Marin was in danger and he needed to leave, immediately. Then, without giving her a chance to ask about it, he was covered in lightning before flying off at high-speed.

Luckily, Alfonzo had finished everything he needed to do with the room itself. So, all he would have to do is use his [Metal Magic] to return the room to its former state. He would not even need to inscribe the sigils into the walls, ceiling, and floor again.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Magnolia.

At the same time, all the other girls in Alfonzo's harem got Marin's emergency signal, as well. Unfortunately, most of them did not have a way to travel to her location fast enough. However, Erza, with her control over the wind could move fairly quickly. So, she released the seal on her [Soul Armament], Astraia, and rushed off in the direction of Shirotsume.

"Do you think Erza will make it in time?" Sun asked in a worried tone.

"Don't worry, Sun." Elicia said with a forced smile on her face. "She'll definitely make it."

"Yeah, Erza will push herself as hard as it takes." Cana said, though it was evident that she was worried.

"We just have to have faith." Ultear added.

"Besides, I'm sure Alfonzo is on the way, as well." Mirajane chipped in. "And he's a lot faster than Erza, even with her control over the wind."

"Yeah, I guess you're right." Sun replied while praying for Marin's safety.

"So, who do you think would attack Marin?" Mirajane asked with anger bubbling just under the surface.

"It's definitely either the homunculi or the members of Tartaros." Elicia replied while gritting her teeth.
"They probably want revenge for the times Fonzie and I ruined their plans."

"We really need to do something about them." Cana growled.

"And we will." Elicia replied in a colder tone than anyone had heard before. "Fonzie already has an idea of where the homunculi hiding. Not sure about Tartaros yet, though."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Ultear asked.

"Because we're not a hundred percent sure of what they are capable of." Elicia replied, though that was not a hundred percent true.

Although Alfonzo and Elicia had a pretty good idea of what to expect from Father and the other homunculi, they were unsure of how to kill them quickly. However, when they find out about the effect that a [Soul Armament] has when it comes in contact with a Philosopher's Stone, that will more than likely change.

The only real concern after that would be finding a way to not collapse all of Crocus during the battle in the cavern under the city.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Shirotsume.

Meanwhile, Marin was searching the cityscape in her inner world for the [Soul Armament]. Unfortunately, things were going much slower than she expected. Though she found quite a few of the replicas her [Armament Spirit] told her about, none of them felt right to her.

"This is, like, super hard." Marin complained after discarding another replica of her [Soul Armament]. "How am I supposed to find the real one with all these fakes around? Even worse, they all look exactly the same."

"With that, Marin stopped to think.

"The [Armament Spirit] said that we come from the same source." Marin said as she pondered aloud. "Then, doesn't that mean I should resonate with it, at least a little bit?"

With that thought, Marin closed her eyes and tried searching her surroundings with her senses. She was trying to feel anything that felt similar to her. Unfortunately, this was quite difficult. Especially when you consider that her inner world was part of her as well. However, she noticed that when searching this way, all the [Soul Armament] replicas did not show up in her search.

"I think I'm on to something." Marin muttered as she opened her eyes. "Although this won't lead me to it directly, it will help me exclude a lot of wrong answers."

With that, Marin started running around the cityscape once again. This time with more confidence.

Meanwhile, Marin's [Armament Spirit], who had dispersed into the air, was watching Marin's every movement.

"Good, you're thinking in the right direction, Marin." The [Armament Spirit] said. "But you're running out of time. You have to hurry. If not, I don't want to even imagine how sad Fonzie will be if anything bad happens to you."

Like that, another five minutes passed in Marin's inner world. Though, not even an instant had passed in the real world. And at that moment, Marin finally found what she was looking for. The only issue was that there were two daggers giving off the same feeling.

"What am I supposed to do now?" Marin asked herself while her gaze shifted between the two daggers. "It said I only have one chance. If I pick the wrong one..."

"You're almost out of time." The [Armament Spirit] said, its voice ringing throughout Marin's inner world. "If you take any longer to decide, it will be too late."

Hearing that, Marin gritted her teeth, anxiety visible in her expression. A moment later, however, her expression became resolute.

"Screw it, I'll just trust my instincts." Marin said as she reached out with both hands. "I'd rather regret doing something wrong than regret doing nothing at all."

In the next instant, Marin wrapped her hands around the two daggers' hilts. Then, she found herself back in her body with Lust's nails closing in on her at high-speed.

["Good! Now release my seal."] The [Armament Spirit] shouted as soon as Marin was back in her body.

"[Bend All Creation to My Will, Nova]." Marin chanted.

At the same time, Marin's magic power spiked to five times its normal amount. At the same time, the dagger in her left hand began to glow with incandescent light. On top of that, Marin wrapped the fingers of her right hand around the hilt of a second dagger.

"[Cover]." Marin commanded just before Lust's [Ultimate Spear] could skewer her.

And with that order, the dagger in Marin's immobilized right hand liquified and covered Marin's entire body in a multi-colored, defensive film. At the same time, the glow surrounding Nova also dimmed. As a result, Marin could be seen holding a kodachi with a multi-colored blade in her left hand. On top of that, the flat side, that is common to Japanese-style swords, was replaced with second sharp edge.

Clang!

In the next instant, Lust's [Ultimate Spear] finally reached Marin. However, instead of piercing into soft human flesh, it was stopped in its tracks by Marin's new defenses.

"What is that?" Lust asked in a frenzied tone.

At the same time, Lust started swinging her arms with reckless abandon, trying to cut through Marin's defenses, to no avail.

'So, I can completely transform you into whatever I want, huh?' Marin asked internally.

["Within reason."] Nova replied. ["But yes, a lot of the restrictions to your magic have been lifted. For example, if you were to elongate my blades, you wouldn't have to worry about the reduction in density. But you won't be able to increase the overall volume."]

'In other words, the blades would get thinner, but they wouldn't be in danger of breaking, right?' Marin asked in return.

["Right."] Nova replied.

'Alright, then I have an idea.' Marin said.

A moment later, Marin willed the film covering her body to cover only the front of her body. Then, she shaped it into a semi-spherical barrier with a tendril connected to her right index finger.

Meanwhile, Lust had stopped her assault. She had no idea why her [Ultimate Spear], that was said to be able to pierce anything, was unable to pierce this thin material, but since she knew Marin was bleeding heavily from her arm, she decided she would simply wait for the girl to pass out from blood loss.

Unfortunately, Lust had no idea what Nova's released state was capable of.

While Lust was intending to wait Marin out, Marin was also aware of her current condition. So, she wasted no time putting the rest of her plan into motion. Stretching out her left arm, Marin inserted the blade of her other kodachi into the semi-spherical shield in front of her. Instead of causing any ripples or pushing the shield outward, the blade simply fused into the shield, increasing its density slightly.

"[Pierce]." Marin commanded once the kodachi sank into the shield up to the hilt.

In the next instant, dozens of thin spikes extended from the shield. And as the spikes elongated, they got thinner and thinner. Eventually, they were no thicker than pieces of thread.

Despite the size of the incoming attacks, Lust felt danger. So, using her [Ultimate Spear], she did her best to deflect all the threads approaching her. Unfortunately, deflecting so many thin attacks at once was more than she could handle.

As a result, several threads made it through Lust's defenses and burrowed into her body. Feeling the equivalent of several simultaneous pricks from a needle, Lust did her best to cut the threads that entered her body. However, just like Marin's sealed [Soul Armament], she was unable to do so.

On top of that, Lust could feel the thin threads burrowing through her body. And when she realized their destination, the expression on her face quickly turned to fear.

"Stop it!" Lust shouted. "You can't do this!"

"Oh, I can..." Marin replied, feeling herself growing faint. "And I... will..."

With that, the needles converged on Lust's Philosopher's Stone. And like before, the souls within were released on contact. And as more threads made contact with the stone, the speed at which the souls were released increased proportionally.

"No! Ahh~~~~~!" Lust screamed as she experienced pain the likes of which she had never experienced in the hundreds of years she had been alive.

After a few seconds, the area, which had been filled with Lust's pain-filled screaming, fell silent. Meanwhile, Lust, who now looked completely haggard, could only glare at Marin with unwillingness in her eyes.

"Usually, I would applaud anyone who could kill me for their ruthlessness..." Lust said weakly. "But I can't bring myself to do so with you. To think I would lose my life to someone so beautiful. It disgusts me. I should be this world's most beautiful being..."

As she spoke, Lust's body, starting at her feet, broke down into dust that was blown away with the breeze. Eventually, she was no more, leaving a dim Philosopher's stone behind that seemed to evaporate as soon as it came in contact with the air.

As soon as Lust was gone, Nova's release was cancelled and the amorphous object returned to being a pair of multi-colored kodachi in Marin's hands.

"I did... it..." Marin muttered as she lost consciousness.

With that, Marin collapsed, falling forward. However, before she could hit the ground, she was caught gently.

"How the fuck did she do that?" Alfonzo asked while adjusting his hold on Marin and picking her up in a princess carry.

["Now's not the time to think about that."] Bedlam said solemnly. ["Look at the cloth wrapped around her arm. It's soaked in blood. There must be a severed artery, or something."]

"Right." Alfonzo replied as he was once again covered in arcs of violet electricity. "I'll think about that later. For now, I need to get Marin to Tsunade."

A moment later, Alfonzo had vanished from where he stood with Marin cradled in his arms.

In order to not worsen Marin's injuries because of the wind pressure while moving at top speed, he made sure to create a then wind shield made of adamantite. So thin, in fact, that Alfonzo could see through it.

In his haste, however, Alfonzo forgot to disable the emergency beacon. As a result, Erza continued to rush towards it. And Alfonzo would not remember the existence of the beacon until Erza had caused a commotion at Mermaid Heel's HQ.

Chapter 375: Getting Marin Treated

About ten minutes after leaving the battlefield, Alfonzo landed in front of the Mermaid Heel guild hall with Marin in his arms.

Currently, Marin was no longer bleeding from the injury to her arm. Still, she had paled significantly due to the loss of blood. On top of that, the injured area had turned a shiny metallic black color.

As it turned out, after flying for a few minutes, and having the chance to calm down, Alfonzo remembered the properties of the Techno Organic Metal. So, he created a small amount while in flight and allowed it to interact with Marin's wounds. Still, Alfonzo thought it would be for the best to have Tsunade take a look at Marin's injuries regardless.

"Is Master Tsunade in?" Alfonzo asked loudly as he pushed open the doors to the guild hall.

"Huh? Alfonzo?" Kagura asked, surprised to see Alfonzo entering the main hall from the front entrance. "Why are you...? Is that Marin? What happened?"

"We can talk about that later." Alfonzo said hurriedly. "I need Master Tsunade to look at her, immediately."

Thanks to Alfonzo's slightly panicked tone, Kagura decided that her questions could wait. Instead, she ran up the stairs and made her way to Tsunade's office. Meanwhile, Alfonzo made his way to the guild hall's medical ward.

"You're back." Ritsu said as she joined Alfonzo on his way to the medical ward. "So, what happened?"

'Fuck... me...' Alfonzo said internally after not feeling Ritsu's presence before she spoke to him. 'How does she do that? That's twice I wasn't able to sense her and this time I'm sure I have my [MPD] spread out.'

["I don't know, but this woman is kind of terrifying."] Bedlam replied.

'Yeah, I'd hate to fight someone I could lose track of so easily.'

["Hmph!"] Riot snorted in disdain. ["You should already know you would never have to worry about that. It's not like she'd fight you any way other than head on, anyway, if her switch got flipped."]

Hearing that, both Alfonzo and Bedlam stopped to consider what Riot said. Then, after a moment, they both could only agree with his assessment.

"Seriously, we need to put a bell on you or something." Alfonzo said while shaking his head. Then, with a more solemn expression on his face, he answered Ritsu's question. "She was attacked by an enemy of mine and Lici's. They probably wanted to use her to lure us out. But Marin is stronger than they thought, I guess. Since she was able to put her attacker down. Unfortunately, she got hurt in the process."

With the end of Alfonzo's explanation, he and Ritsu finally reached the medical ward. Then, Alfonzo wasted no time laying Marin down on one of the beds.

"Well, since Tsuna isn't here yet, I'll take a look at her first." Ritsu said as she approached the bed, as well.

Knowing of Ritsu's healing prowess, Alfonzo did not hesitate to step away from the bedside, making room for Ritsu to examine Marin's condition. However, when Ritsu saw the injured area, she found herself thoroughly confused.

"What is this?" Ritsu asked, pointing at the metallic flesh.

"Oh, that was me." Alfonzo replied, reaching out his hand towards Marin's injured arm. "This metal has healing properties, along with other side effects. But it was the only thing I could think of to stop the bleeding."

With that, Alfonzo exerted a bit of his magic power. Then, the Techno Organic Metal that was currently healing Marin's arm was slowly pulled out of the injury. Unfortunately, the short time it took for Alfonzo to return to the Mermaid Heel HQ was not enough time for the wound to close completely.

With the metal gone, Ritsu was finally able to get a good look at Marin's injury.

"The artery was cut." Ritsu said calmly. "It's a good thing you used that metal of yours, though. Otherwise, there's a good chance she would have bled out before you could get her here. The cut artery was the same one that suicide victims generally choose on the wrist. Just further up the arm."

"Can you save her?" Alfonzo asked with a hint of anxiety in his tone.

"I can." Ritsu replied with a nod and a gentle smile. "But we should take her outside before I start my treatment."

'I see.' Alfonzo thought to himself as he lifted Marin once again without hesitation. 'She's gonna unseal Minazuki, huh? Yeah, I guess that big ass manta ray thing would be too big for this room.'

With that, Alfonzo, with Marin in his arms, and Ritsu made their way out towards the training field. Along the way, they met up with Wendy, Carla, Virgo, Kagura, and Tsunade, who had rushed down from Tsunade's office.

"What's the situation?" Tsunade asked as soon as she caught sight of Alfonzo and Marin. "How bad are her injuries?"

"They're pretty severe." Ritsu replied. "But I'll take care of them."

"Were they really that bad?" Tsunade asked, knowing what it meant for Ritsu to be leading Alfonzo outside.

"Yes and no." Ritsu replied. "If Alfonzo was unable to do some level of healing before arriving here, I wouldn't be able to save her."

"Is Marin going to be okay?" Wendy asked in a worried tone with tears pooling in her eyes.

"Don't worry, little one." Ritsu replied with a gentle smile. "I'll be able to heal her."

"So, you're going to use that, huh?" Tsunade asked.

"Indeed." Ritsu replied with a nod. "This way, I can take care of her healing while Alfonzo gets back to work. And since she'll be nearby, he won't have anything to worry about."

Despite himself, Alfonzo could only smile wryly at Ritsu's words. He could tell she was not happy by the way he seemingly destroyed all the work he had done over the last week and flew off with almost no explanation.

A few moments later, the group of eight arrived on the outdoor training ground, catching the attention of those who were still training.

"Hey, is something wrong?" Anko asked while standing perpendicular to a vertical wall.

With that, she leapt off the wall and made her way over to the group.

"Is that Marin, what happened to her?" Anko asked.

"Leave your questions for later, Anko." Ritsu said as she gripped the hilt of her katana. "[Minazuki]."

Just as Ritsu spoke the name of her sword, her Zanpakuto, the hilt, along with the blade that was still inside the sheath, turned into a green sludge that flowed out of the sheath and began to float in the air.

A moment later, the sludge began to expand, eventually taking the form of a large, floating, one-eyed manta ray with its mouth open.

"Lay her down in its mouth." Ritsu said calmly.

Hearing that, Wendy and Carla looked at Ritsu warily. Meanwhile, Alfonzo did as instructed without hesitation.

"Alfonzo, is that really a good idea?" Wendy asked with trepidation in her tone.

"Yeah, we don't even know what that thing is." Carla added.

"If she wanted to hurt Marin, the only thing she needed to do was refuse to treat her." Alfonzo said as he laid Marin inside the manta ray's mouth. "She wouldn't need to go through all this."

"He's right." Tsunade said as she patted Wendy and Carla on their heads. "That's Master Ritsu's unique [Healing Magic]. It's even more effective than my healing skills."

With Tsunade's explanation, Wendy and Carla visibly relaxed.

"Anyway, now that Master Ritsu is handling the case, let's go back to my office." Tsunade said, patting the girls on the head once more. "You've still got a lot of work to do."

In response, Wendy and Carla, though still concerned about Marin's well-being, turned around and followed Tsunade back into the guild hall. Virgo was about to follow them, as well. However, before she could get very far, Alfonzo stopped her.

"Virgo, I need you to go back and make lunch for Lucy." Alfonzo said with a wry smile. "I panicked a little when I got Marin's emergency signal... And I kinda made a bit of a mess that I have to clean up. Tell Lucy that I'm sorry, too."

"Yes, Master Alfonzo." Virgo replied with a respectful bow. "I'll return once I have completed my task."

With that, Virgo turned around and made her way towards the house where the Fairy Tail wizards were staying. At the same time, Kagura and Anko returned to what they were doing, as well.

"Now, you should be able to get back to work with no worries, correct?" Ritsu said once all the others were gone.

"Yeah, I'll clean up the mess I made." Alfonzo said with a wry smile. "Let's get back to work."

A few moments later, Alfonzo and Ritsu, with Minazuki in tow, returned to the work site Alfonzo abandoned earlier in the day. Then, with little effort, Alfonzo expanded the crushed training room back to its original size.

Unfortunately, due to the magic power he expended on his round trip, Alfonzo's work pace was slowed significantly. Luckily, Ritsu did not blame him for that. Had he not been more concerned for the well-being of one of his women than making some money, she would have been rather disappointed in him, after all.

Like that, the next couple hours went by with no issues. However, as soon as Alfonzo finished running all the mithril wiring from the training room to Tsunade's office, he had a thought while wiping off the sweat he accumulated while working.

'I feel like I forgot something.' Alfonzo thought to himself. 'But for the life of me, I can't think of what it could be.'

["Well, if you can't remember what it is, then it probably isn't that important, right?"] Bedlam asked.

'I guess you're right.' Alfonzo thought while pondering what it could be.

After that, Alfonzo continued to work, making sure all the connections were secure while testing that the console he installed in Tsunade's office could control all the functions of the training room.

["I think I just figured out what Alfonzo forgot."] Riot said.

["Oh yea, what is it?"] Bedlam asked in curiosity.

Before Riot could reply, the sound of the wind picking up could be heard from every part of the Mermaid Heel HQ.

Smack!

And upon hearing the sound of the wind, Alfonzo could not help but face palm

"Damn it, I forgot to disable Marin's emergency signal." Alfonzo groaned into his hand.

Meanwhile, with Astraia still released, Erza had just landed near the location where Alfonzo installed the first of the training rooms. And when she did, her eyes fell on the large, one-eyed manta ray floating above Ritsū.

A moment later, she looked down at the lacrima that had been guiding her to Marin's location.

"So, you have betrayed Fairy Tail's trust?" Erza asked as she jumped to conclusions. "Why have you abducted Marin?"

"I think it would be best if you calmed down." Ritsu replied with her usual gentle smile.

"Answer my question or I'll force you to." Erza said as she pointed Astraia at Ritsu.

"*Sigh* So impulsive." Ritsu said in an exasperated tone.

In the next instant, a number of wizards from Mermaid Heel arrived on the training field and surrounded Erza.

"Erzie-Werzie, what are you doing here, meow?" Millianna asked after noticing who the intruder was.

"Millianna?" Erza asked without lowering her guard. "Have you joined with the guild of---"

"Alright, Erza, that's enough." Alfonzo said as he appeared behind Erza in a flash of violet lightning.
"You're jumping to conclusions again."

"Alfonzo, what's going on here?" Erza asked, now sounding thoroughly confused.

"*Sigh* You really should have had that tone when you first showed up." Alfonzo said while combing his fingers through Erza's hair. Then, with his free hand, he pointed at Minazuki. "Right now, Marin is in that thing's stomach. According to what Master Unohana told me, its stomach acids are powerful medicines and healing ointments. As for what happened to Marin, I'll tell you later."

"I see." Erza replied with a nod. "Then, she turned to address the wizards of Mermaid Heel and bowed her head. "Please forgive me. In my worry, I made false accusations. Please hit me as recompense."

With that, Erza dispelled Astraia's release, reverting the sword back to its sealed state. However, as soon as she did, her body went limp and she passed out from magic power exhaustion.

"I guess I should have seen this coming." Alfonzo said while smiling wryly. "She probably flew off from Magnolia at top speed after getting the emergency signal. Then, partway to Shirotsume, she had to redirect and come here. It's no wonder she's exhausted."

["And that's why you have to keep your cool in all situations."] Bedlam said in a sagely tone. ["Had you remained calm, you would have remembered about the emergency signal and stopped it much earlier. Then, none of this would have happened."]

["yeah, you really should take a page out of my book."] Riot said. ["I mean, look at how calm I was in this situation. I was even the one who remembered about the emergency signal."]

In response, both Alfonzo and Bedlam decided they had not heard Riot speak.. at all.

In the end, both Marin and Erza were allowed to rest in the Mermaid Heel medical ward until Alfonzo and Wendy were ready to return to their house. Then, after returning home for the evening, Alfonzo laid Erza and Marin on the bed in the room where Lucy's belongings were being stored, before he got dinner started.

Chapter 376: In the Middle of the Night

Shortly after the clock struck midnight, The homunculi were once again gathered in the cavern under Crocus.

"What's taking Lust so long?" Envy said impatiently with his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"I don't know why you're complaining like that, Envy." Greed said in a nonchalant tone. "It's not like Shirotsume is a short walk away from the capital."

"That doesn't matter." Envy replied snappily. "She should have been here by now."

"Lust, where are you?" Gluttony asked with a lost expression on his face while looking around fearfully.

"See, that's why I want her back here." Envy said in an annoyed tone. "Without Lust, no one can stop his incessant whining."

"I guess you're right." Greed replied while shrugging uncaringly.

"There is no need to wait for Lust." Father said from atop his throne. "She won't be joining us tonight... Or ever again."

Hearing that, the three homunculi standing below the dragon's skeleton widened their eyes in shock.

"Lust has failed her mission." Father continued, seemingly unbothered by the fact that he lost another one of his homunculi. "And lost her life in the process."

"How is that possible?" Envy questioned angrily. "There should be no way that Lust was unable to run away before it was too late."

"As of now, I have no answer to that question." Father replied.

"Did that Alfonzo brat show up and send her into space like he did with Wrath?" Greed asked with a contemplative expression on his face.

"That is a distinct possibility." Father replied with a nod.

"Lust... is dead?" Gluttony asked, sounding as if he was unable to believe what he just heard.

A moment later, Gluttony's expression turned wrathful. Then, he opened his mouth wide. After that, however, nothing happened. Though it was clear that he was trying to open his torso like he did when he and Lust sneak attacked Elicia. Unfortunately, the stitching Elicia left behind to seal his [False Gate of Truth] was still in place.

"That is truly a remarkable ability." Father said while watching Gluttony rage. "Unfortunately, it is paramount that we find a way to dispel it."

'Yeah, I don't see this working out.' Greed thought to himself. 'It seems to me that they have a way to defeat our kind rather quickly. Unfortunately, we have no idea what it is. Either way, I think it's time to get off this sinking ship. I'll wait for "Dear Old Dad" to send me on a task. And when he does, I'm never coming back.'

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Mermaid Heel HQ.

At around the same time, in the spare bedroom of the Fairy Tail wizards' lodging, the bed was occupied by two unconscious women. And at that time, the first of the two women, Marin, began to stir. To her surprise, she was no longer feeling much pain from her injured arm. Instead, the intense pain she was feeling before she lost consciousness was replaced with a dull ache.

'I'm still alive?' Marin asked herself as she moved her right arm gingerly. 'But how? There was no one around to help me.'

["You forgot, huh?"] Nova asked from Marin's inner world. ["You set off your emergency beacon before you started fighting that homunculus, remember?"]

Stopping for a moment to recollect the events before she lost consciousness, Marin eventually remembered the beacon. Then, she exhaled a sigh of relief.

'I guess that means someone rushed over to save me.' Marin said internally. 'But I wonder who it was.'

["There's only one person who has the receiver of the beacon, and is fast enough to make it in time, you know."] Nova replied while rolling her eyes. ["I don't know why you even have to think about it. Who else could it be other than Fonzie."]

'*Sigh* I guess you're right.' Marin replied with a smile creeping on to her face. 'I guess I'm really lucky he's my boyfriend, huh?'

["Damn right, you are."] Nova replied proudly.

With that, Marin finally let herself relax completely. And when she did, she noticed her face was being pressed into something both large and soft.

'What is this?' Marin asked herself while trying to lift her arms to touch the thing... or rather, things her face was pressed into.

Unfortunately, there seemed to be something wrapped around her arms and torso, preventing Marin from moving her arms.

'And what is this wrapped around me?' Marin asked herself yet again.

["Honestly, I'm not sure."] Nova replied in an unsure tone. ["When you're unconscious, I can't see the outside world. But You should probably spread your [Magic Power Detection] and take a look."]

Agreeing with Nova, Marin did just that and spread her [Magic Power Detection].

'So, I'm in the Mermaid Heel HQ.' Marin thought to herself. 'More importantly, the one holding me in place, is this... Erza?'

["It would seem so."] Nova replied.

'But why is she here?' Marin asked in a confused tone. 'And why is she hugging me like this?'

["If I had to guess, she probably followed the emergency signal."] Nova replied. ["But why she's hugging you to her chest like that, I have no clue."]

As it turns out, after bringing Marin and Erza to the house, Alfonzo laid them down in the same bed. Then, he went to take care of dinner for the other people staying in the house. And since neither of them woke up after he finished with dinner, he decided to let them sleep.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo told Lucy all about what happened to day. Especially since she was quite unhappy that he did not keep his promise of coming to see her during his lunch break. However, when she heard the whole story of what happened, she did not stay angry for long.

'I guess that makes sense.' Marin thought to herself as she tried to gently remove Erza's arms from around her.

Unfortunately, Marin's movements managed to rouse Erza from her sleep, as well.

"Huh?" Erza muttered groggily. "Where am I?"

"Oh, did I wake you?" Marin asked. "Sorry, I didn't mean to do that."

"Hmm? Marin?" Erza asked, clearly still half-asleep. "Oh, it's just you..."

With that, Erza closed her eyes, ready to go back to sleep. At the same time, she tightened her hold on Marin, who could only smile wryly because of that.

A moment later, however, Erza's eyes shot open, and she looked down towards her bosom. Then, she tightened her hug even further.

"Marin, thank goodness you're all right!" Erza shouted loud enough to be heard by everyone on the second floor of the house.

Pat *Pat*

"Yeah, I'm fine..." Marin said weakly as she patted Erza's arms while the air was being pressed out of her lungs. "But if you don't let go, I won't be for long..."

Hearing the struggle in Marin's voice, Erza loosened her hold. Though, she did not release Marin completely. Instead, she tried to look her over for any more injuries. Unfortunately, since the lights in the room were off, that was much harder than it would have usually been.

Then, just when Erza realized she needed more light, the door to the bedroom was opened before the lights were turned on. Looking in the direction of the, now, open door, Erza and Marin saw Lucy, Wendy, and Carla standing in the doorway.

"Oh, good." Lucy said in a relieved tone. "You two are awake."

"Are you guys, okay?" Wendy asked in a worried tone.

"You two should be more careful." Carla added. "You really made Wendy worry."

Though Carla spoke dismissively, it was clear to anyone who looked at her that she was just as, if not more, worried than Wendy. And naturally for her, the three older girls all noticed. As a result, they all smiled at her gently.

"What are those looks for?" Carla asked with a huff as she turned her head away to hide her embarrassment.

"By the way..." Marin said while craning her neck to look behind Lucy, Wendy, and Carla. "Where is Fonzie?"

"Now that you mention it..." Erza added as she loosened her grip on Marin. "I can't feel his magic power signature."

Hearing Erza and Marin ask about Alfonzo, a pout appeared on Lucy's face. Meanwhile, Wendy and Carla looked up at her with curious gazes, as well.

"He left to work on something secret." Lucy said in a clearly discontented tone. "Apparently, he's been leaving in the middle of the night to work on it every night since you all first got here."

"Really?" Marin asked with her eyes widening in surprise. "But he always went to bed and woke up with me in the morning."

"Yeah, he told me about that." Lucy said, her pout deepening as she spoke. "He snuck out after you fell asleep and always made sure to be back before you woke up."

Once again, Marin was shocked. And the expression on her face showed that emotion perfectly.

"Uh... Anyway, we should probably talk about that later." Marin said, regaining her composure quickly. "For now, Wendy, Carla, I think the two of you should get back to bed. You have to train with Master Tsunade in the morning, after all."

Without a fuss, Wendy nodded her head with a wry smile on her face. She was clearly interested in the gossip that would definitely follow. Unfortunately, after learning under Tsunade, which consisted of

avoiding attacks for the majority of the morning and trying out the medical techniques she learned in practical training in the afternoon, she was exhausted. So, she followed Marin's advice obediently.

"Good night." Wendy said as she turned around to return to her room. "And I'm glad you two are okay."

"Hmph! I knew he was just a playboy." Carla muttered quietly, though not quiet enough to escape the ears of everyone else, while she followed Wendy back to their room.

Meanwhile, Erza, Marin, and Lucy smiled at Wendy's concern. However, when they heard what Carla muttered, their smiles turned wry rather quickly. Eventually, they heard the sound of Wendy and Carla's bedroom door closing. Then, Erza and Marin's gazes fell on Lucy.

"So, what has Fonzie been sneaking out to do?" Marin asked in a tone mixed with sternness and curiosity.

"If I knew, I'd tell you." Lucy said, her tone a little dejected. "But he's keeping it a secret, for now."

"Could he be seeing someone behind our backs?" Erza asked in a contemplative tone. "According to the novels I read, for someone of his stature, it's not unthinkable."

"No." Marin and Lucy replied simultaneously.

"Fonzie would never do something like that." Marin said with conviction.

"He promised me that wasn't the case." Lucy added. " He even swore on his magic that he wasn't sneaking around with another woman."

Hearing that, both Erza and Marin sighed in relief.

"Then, where do you think he's going?" Marin asked in a curious tone. "Wait, more important than that, how did you find out? If he was sneaking out, I'm sure he would wait until everyone was asleep, right?"

Not only Marin, but Erza also looked at Lucy with curiosity after Marin asked her question.

At the same time, Lucy began to blush.

"Oh, there must be a story behind this." Marin said as she stood from the bed. Then, she continued as she reached Lucy's side. "Why don't you tell us about it."

A moment later, Erza appeared on Lucy's other side.

"Indeed, I'm curious to know, as well." Erza added with a smile.

Then, both Erza and Marin threw an arm around Lucy's shoulders as they walked her over to the bed.

"*Sigh* You two aren't gonna let me go until I tell you everything, are you?" Lucy asked in a resigned tone.

"Nope!" Marin replied excitedly.

"Is it something you can't tell us?" Erza asked curiously.

"No, not really." Lucy replied with her blush deepening. "It's just embarrassing."

"Oh, now I definitely have to know." Marin replied, her excitement rising.

"Okay, fine." Lucy said as she got comfortable on the bed between Erza and Marin. "It started after dinner, the night before last. After washing the dishes, I went and took a shower. Then, I put on the sexiest lingerie I owned and made my way to Alfonzo's room..."

Like that, Lucy told Erza and Marin the story of how she lost her virginity. And although the part about how she noticed that Alfonzo was completely dressed after taking a shower was in there, as well, the girls decided they could talk about that later. Instead, they were more interested in getting Lucy to spill all the details of her first time with Alfonzo.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo, with Riot and Bedlam released, was floating above the island where he was building the venue for his and Elicia's wedding, which would also serve as his and the girl's new residence after the wedding.

["Was it really a good idea to leave and work on this tonight?"] Bedlam asked. ["I mean, won't it make it harder to keep the fact that you're leaving in the middle of the night a secret?"]

"Don't worry about it, Bedlam." Alfonzo replied while molding the outer walls of the structure. "I'm sure Lucy will tell them about it, eventually. So, it's better to just get the job done."

["Besides, they'll thank him for it later."] Riot added. ["Though, I'm amazed you decided to make a recreation of the Playboy Mansion."]

"Well, I happened to see it on the internet in my past life." Alfonzo replied. "And regardless of its original intent, it was an impressive floor plan. So, I thought, why the fuck not."

Like that, while Marin, Erza, and Lucy continued to chat about their night lives, Alfonzo continued to chat with his [Armament Spirits] while he continued building his side project. And thanks to the fact that he slowed down while working on the Mermaid Heel training facilities, after bringing Marin back, he had more than enough magic power to work at his usual pace.

Then, when he eventually returned to the house in the Mermaid Heel HQ, Alfonzo noticed that Erza, Marin, and Lucy were sleeping together in the other room. So, instead of bothering them, he just went to bed, intending to get a couple hours of sleep before he had to start working again.

Chapter 377: The Homunculi's Weakness

Like so many other mornings, Alfonzo woke up in a warm, comfortable bed. On top of that, he could feel the warmth of several bodies pressing against him, as well. However, this is where the similarities to the way he normally woke up ended.

Unlike the usual, Alfonzo did not feel his arms being sandwiched by soft flesh. Well... That would be a bit inaccurate, as his arms were feeling the soft flesh of two women weighing down on them. However, it felt more like he was being restrained rather than hugged lovingly.

On top of that, there was also pressure on his waist, undoubtedly from someone sitting on him. At the same time, he could feel the pressure from a pair of hands on his chest.

'Well, this is different.' Alfonzo thought to himself without opening his eyes. 'I don't think I ever woke up like this before. I wonder what kind of game these girls are playing.'

Naturally, after feeling something different, Alfonzo spread his [Magic Power Detection]. Immediately afterwards, he was able to identify the three weights that had settled atop him. Sitting on his waist was Erza. While Marin and Lucy each sat on his left and right arm, respectively.

["There's really only one way to find out, isn't there?"] Bedlam asked with a grin.

'I guess you're right.' Alfonzo replied internally.

"So, to what do I owe the pleasure of feeling all three of your asses on me, first thing in the morning?" Alfonzo asked as he opened his eyes and raised his head slightly to slowly make eye contact with each of the girls.

Upon making eye contact with each of the girls, Marin, Erza, and Lucy smiled brightly in turn. However, Alfonzo could tell that they were a little unhappy about something.

"We are not pleased that you are keeping secrets, Alfonzo." Erza said, her brilliant smile turning into a stern expression instantly.

"Yeah, and how could you sneak out like that after I fell asleep?" Marin asked with a pout.

"So, we've decided that we're going to get the truth out of you, one way or another." Lucy added with a solemn expression, as well.

"*Sigh* I guess I should have seen this coming, huh?" Alfonzo said as he let his head sink back into his pillow. "Unfortunately, this has to remain a secret."

"Is keeping your secret more important to you than the discontent of your lovers?" Erza asked, her stern expression turning into a frown.

"Or, are you afraid that we'll tell someone?" Marin asked, her pout deepening as she asked.

Meanwhile, Lucy, who had already tried those tricks, only kept her silence while glaring at Alfonzo with increasing intensity.

"*Sigh* You all know that's not it." Alfonzo said while gently shaking his head. "I trust all of you with my life. So, of course I'm not afraid of the secret getting out."

"Then, why?" Lucy asked in a huff.

"Because if I told you, it would ruin the surprise." Alfonzo said with a grin. "Although this project is mostly meant for a single purpose, it's meant to be a surprise for all of you, as well. And what would be the fun if only a few of you knew about it while the others were left in the dark."

"Then, you can just tell all of us, right?" Marin asked, her pout now replaced with a bright smile. "If you do, I promise we'll make it worth your while."

As she spoke the last part, Marin reached to her shoulder and slowly lowered the strap of her tank top, causing more of her left breast to be revealed.

"As fun as that sounds, I think I'll let the surprise, be a surprise." Alfonzo replied with a grin.

Once again, Marin's smile transformed into a pout. Then, she raised her tank top's strap and hid her breast away before turning her head away.

"Fine, have it your way." Marin said, clearly not happy that her seduction attempt failed.

"It would seem we are unable to get any more information out of you." Erza said as she relaxed her posture. "I guess we'll just have to wait until the surprise is uncovered. And since Lucy told us about your promise that you were not seeing another woman behind our backs, I suppose there is no harm in waiting."

"*Sigh* I told you this wouldn't work." Lucy said as she, too, relaxed her posture.

"Yeah, but I was looking forward to rewarding him after he gave in." Marin said while continuing to pout. "I even had a new idea of how I could add my [Transformation Magic] into the fun."

"You know, it's not like we need a reason to do that, though." Lucy pointed out.

"I know. I know." Marin said while waving off Lucy's comment. "But this would have made it feel more special."

"After hearing that you had a new idea, I must admit, I'm rather curious." Erza said as she glanced at Marin.

"And you should be." Marin said while smiling proudly. "You really should look forward to it."

Like that, while continuing to sit on top of Alfonzo, the girls chatted without a care in the world. Meanwhile, Alfonzo could only watch them with a wry smile on his face.

'If I didn't know any better, I'd think they forgot I was down here.' Alfonzo thought while enjoying Erza, Marin, and Lucy's smiles.

["Yeah, we all know they're just messing with you."] Bedlam replied.

'Well then, I think we should do something about that.' Alfonzo replied with a mischievous grin.

In the next instant, Alfonzo bucked his hips while simultaneously swinging his arms upwards. As a result, Erza, Marin, and Lucy were all thrown into the air with dumbfounded expressions on their faces. Then, they all landed on top of Alfonzo, with Erza landing on his chest and Marin and Lucy landing in his outstretched arms.

"There, this is much more comfortable, don't you think?" Alfonzo asked as he wrapped his arms around Marin and Lucy.

"*Sigh* Somehow I forgot how strong he is." Marin said with a wry smile on her face.

"Yeah, if he wasn't playing along with us, we would have never been able to hold him down like that." Lucy added while sporting a similar wry smile.

"But that's why we love him the way we do, right?" Erza asked as she snuggled into Alfonzo's chest. "He let us air out our grievances, as it were."

"*Sigh* That's true." Marin and Lucy replied simultaneously while also snuggling into Alfonzo's embrace.

Then, for the next few minutes, the group of four fell into a comfortable silence. However, that silence was broken when Alfonzo remembered a question he had from the day before.

"Hey, Marin, I got a question for you." Alfonzo said while turning his head to address Marin.

"What's up?" Marin asked as she tilted her head to make eye contact.

"By the time I reached you yesterday, the homunculus, Lust, was already turning to dust." Alfonzo said. "But how did you kill her so fast? I mean, from what I can tell, you'd usually have to injure her over and over until her Philosopher's Stone ran out of power."

Hearing that, Erza and Lucy's gazes also fell on Marin. Even though Lucy already knew Marin fought a homunculus yesterday, Erza had not yet heard the story. So, she was even more curious to know what happened.

"Wait, Marin, you killed one of those things?" Lucy asked in a disbelieving tone. "You mean, it didn't run away when Alfonzo showed up?"

"I thought I told you; the fight was over by the time I got there." Alfonzo said as he turned his head towards Lucy. "The only thing I did was catch Marin before she face planted into the ground, picked her up, and flew her back here."

"Yeah, but I didn't think that meant she won." Lucy said in an incredulous tone.

"Are you trying to call me weak?" Marin asked with a playful smile on her face. Then, she freed herself from Alfonzo's hug and jumped over both Alfonzo and Erza, before landing on top of Lucy. "I'll show you just how strong I am!"

"Hey, Marin, what are you--- Hahaha! Marin, sto--- Ahahahahaha!" Lucy began to ask before bursting into raucous laughter.

"Yeah, that will teach you to look down on me, Lucy!" Marin shouted as she tickled Lucy mercilessly.

Meanwhile, Erza allowed herself to roll off of Alfonzo's chest and settle into the space Marin had just vacated while she and Alfonzo watched Marin and Lucy play around.

"I'm truly thankful that everything turned out all right." Erza said with a smile. "I would hate to lose moments like this."

"Yeah." Alfonzo replied with a smile and a nod. "But I think we should stop them soon. We still haven't heard from Marin how she took out the homunculus so fast."

"Agreed." Erza replied with a nod.

That said, Alfonzo and Erza did not immediately move to stop Marin's relentless tickle torture. Instead, they waited until it looked like Lucy would run out of breath before intervening.

A few minutes later, everyone had once again taken up relaxed positions. Though, Lucy was still breathing somewhat heavily.

"I thought I was gonna pee myself." Lucy said between labored breaths.

"Well, at least I stopped before that happened." Marin said from her spot atop Alfonzo's chest.

Hearing that, Lucy glared at Marin resentfully.

"No, you were stopped before that happened." Lucy barked back.

"Same difference." Marin replied with a shrug.

"Anyway, Marin, tell us what happened while you were fighting the homunculus.

"Right." Marin replied with a nod as her expression turned serious once again. It actually happened just after I got hurt. Right after my arm got slashed, I lunged forward and stabbed Nova into---"

"Wait! Is that the name of your [Soul Armament]?" Lucy asked, interrupting Marin's story again.

While Erza was just as shocked as Lucy this time, Alfonzo was much calmer, as he was there to see when Nova reverted to its sealed state.

"Oh, I guess I forgot to mention that, huh?" Marin said as she sat up on Alfonzo's waist.

Then, while grabbing at the multi-colored bracelets on her wrists, she reverted them back to their original forms, a pair of multi-colored, double-edged, kodachi.

"This is Nova." Marin said, holding out her [Soul Armament]. "And even though there are two of them, there's only one spirit."

"Interesting." Erza replied while inspecting the quality of the two short swords.

"But how did you find out her name so fast." Lucy asked in an amazed tone.

"I was just about to tell you that." Marin said as she turned Nova back into a pair of bracelets. "But a certain someone keeps interrupting me."

As she spoke, Marin reached over and pinched Lucy, who had started to blush in embarrassment, on the cheek. Then, after having her fun, she continued her story.

"Anyway, after I stabbed Nova's initial form into her chest, she screamed, like, really loud." Marin said, continuing her story. "And then, Nova told me that she could sense the souls inside of the Philosopher's Stone escaping when her blade made contact with the stone."

"But how is that possible?" Erza asked, though it was obvious that Lucy was thinking the same thing.

"If I had to guess, it was because the [Soul Armaments] are created from our souls." Alfonzo said with a contemplative expression on his face. "And while in most situation, if we were to attack someone with them, there wouldn't be much of a difference from a normal weapon, most-likely because the body insulates the soul from the attack, but when attacking something like a Philosopher's Stone, which is only made up of souls, they probably have a much greater effect."

"Yeah, Nova said something like that, too." Marin replied with a nod. "Anyway, after that, I dodged around, trying to get close enough to attack the stone again. But the homunculus wouldn't let me get close."

From there, Marin explained what she had to go through to hear Nova's name and how she defeated Lust.

"After that, I passed out." Marin said, concluding her story. "And... Well... You know what happened after that."

With that, the room fell into silence while everyone digested Marin's story.

"Alright, now that we know how to finish off the homunculus, things will be a lot easier going forward." Alfonzo said, snapping the girls out of their contemplations. "But we can worry about that later, it's almost time for me to start getting ready."

"Ooh! I'll help you get washed up." Marin said as she sprung out of bed.

"I will offer my aid, as well." Erza said as she climbed out of bed shortly after Marin.

"Well, if they're doing it, I'll help, too." Lucy said, following the other two.

As Erza, Marin, and Lucy got out of bed, they missed the malevolent glint that passed through Alfonzo's eyes.

'Good, now I know how to get revenge.' Alfonzo thought to himself. 'After hearing what Bradley muttered about them leaking the information about where our parents lived, I'm sure Lici will be ready for a homunculus massacre, too.'

["Fuck yeah, this is gonna be fun!"] Riot shouted excitedly.

["We'll have to make them pay for what they did to Marin, too."] Bedlam said with a malevolent smile on his face. ["They undoubtedly wanted to capture her to lure us out. And we need to show them why that was such a bad idea."]

With that, Alfonzo got out of bed and followed the girls into the master bathroom while doing his best to stop his current emotions from showing up on his face.

Chapter 378: Leaving Mermaid Heel

After taking their time in the bathroom, Alfonzo, Erza, Marin, and Lucy made their way downstairs and met up with Wendy and Carla, who had also just finished preparing for the day. Then, after making their morning greeting, Alfonzo headed to the kitchen to prepare breakfast while the girls chatted to their heart's content.

After breakfast, Alfonzo, Wendy, and Carla were once again accompanied by Virgo as they made their way to the Mermaid Heel guild hall. Meanwhile, Lucy drove Erza and Marin to Cedar Town so they could catch a train to head home.

On top of that, they would have to make a stop in Shirotsume to pick up Marin's luggage and let the Sorcerer Weekly crew, if they were still in Shirotsume, know that Marin was all right, as well as inform them that the threat had been dealt with. And if the crew had not incurred too much mental damage, they could even finish the photo shoot, that never actually got started.

To Erza and Marin's surprise, the crew was still in Shirotsume. And the reason was simple, Lust knew all their identities. So, they thought, if Marin had lost, they would rather not lead that homicidal woman back to their families. On top of that, as professionals, they were ready to finish their job, regardless of the dangers involved, something Erza applauded them for.

So, With Erza as extra security, Marin finished her photo shoot before she and Erza returned to Magnolia by train. Meanwhile, Alfonzo and Wendy continued their work at the Mermaid heel Headquarters. And thankfully, nothing else of note happened during their stay. Well, other than Tsunade trying to poach Wendy into her guild, an attempt that failed miserably.

Other than that, everything went off without a hitch, with Lucy spending a total of two weeks with Alfonzo, Wendy, and Carla, before being replaced by Cana for the last week. And surprisingly, during that week, Cana found another best friend. And that friend was Anko, whose personality seemed to mesh well with hers, as they could both be rather rampant in their behavior.

Another thing that was worthy of mention was the fact that Alfonzo finished the majority of his side project, his and his girls' new residence. Though, he still had some finishing touches to put on it. For example, hiring capable masons to put a brick and stone exterior on it. As for the interior, he would have to hire carpenters to cover the interior walls with wood and drywall, as well.

But with the use of magic, Alfonzo believed all those jobs could be taken care of in no longer than a month and a half, leaving him plenty of time to move the estate to its place in the center of Lake Sciliora.

The only real issue would be getting the masons and contractors to the island to put on the finishing touches without any of the girls finding out. However, he decided he would just hire them from Cedar instead of a town closer to Magnolia to keep the secret. And as for checking on their work, he could do so while taking a quest, and no one would know that he was going to do something else.

After all that, the day to return to Magnolia finally arrived. And currently, Alfonzo, Cana, Wendy, and Carla were standing outside of the Mermaid Heel guild hall saying their goodbyes to the people they had grown close to over the last while.

"Are you sure you don't wanna stay here and join Mermaid Heel, Wendy?" Tsunade asked while patting Wendy on the head. "Naturally, that offer extends to Carla, as well."

"Um... No thank you." Wendy said with her head lowered awkwardly. "But... Thank you for the offer."

"*Sigh* Master Tsunade, please stop trying to poach away our young and talented wizards." Alfonzo said as she gently pulled Wendy away from Tsunade's hand.

"Tch!" Tsunade clicked her tongue in response.

Over the last month, Tsunade really took a liking to Wendy. Her polite personality was a breath of fresh air. Though not as energetic, she was a lot like Beth. IN fact, the two had gotten along quite well during the time the Fairy Tail wizards were guests of Mermaid Heel.

"See you next time, Wendy." Beth waved with a smile. "Next time our wizards come to visit, I'll come with them. Then, you can show me around your guild, okay?"

"Of course." Wendy replied with a smile of her own. "I'll show you all of Magnolia, too."

"Then, that's a promise." Beth replied cheerfully.

Meanwhile, Cana and Anko were having their own goodbye, as well.

"So, you're saying Alfonzo makes dango, too?" Anko asked with her eyes opened wide in surprise.

"Yeah, though, he really only makes them for Sun, who really seems to like them." Cana replied before taking a swig from the flask her father bought her a while ago.

"Damn it, and he didn't tell me." Anko said while clenching her fists. "Next time I see him, I'll definitely make him cook some for me."

"Yeah, if you ever come to visit, all you have to do is talk to Sun about them, and he'll give in easily when she asks for some."

"Got it." Anko replied with a nod.

"Hey, Cana, quit telling my secrets." Alfonzo said with a bit of annoyance in his tone.

In response, Cana only poked out her tongue with a smile on her face.

"On top of that, I'll show you my private alcohol collection." Cana said in a whisper. "But even I don't touch that too often, so you'll only get a little taste."

Though Cana was whispering, Alfonzo was still able to hear her. As a result, his eyes were opened quite wide in surprise.

'Holy shit!' Alfonzo exclaimed internally. 'Did Cana just offer some of her private stash to someone? Is the world going to end soon?'

"It's a shame to see you leave so soon, Alfonzo." Ritsu said, breaking Alfonzo out of his thoughts. "I would have liked to see your skills in combat. I've heard quite a bit about your combat prowess from Makarov during our shared time on the new Magic Council."

As it turns out, though there were only a few spots for former guild masters from each country on the Magic Council, due to her experience, Ritsu was voted onto the Council unanimously. As a result, she spent a lot more time than she usually would with Makarov. Time that he spent fearing for his life... and manhood.

And during that time, Makarov could not help but brag about his most talented children, with Alfonzo taking one of those spots. And because of that, Ritsu took an interest in Alfonzo's fighting ability. In fact, that was the whole reason she offered to accompany Alfonzo while he was working, in the hopes that she would maybe get the chance to spar with him afterwards.

Unfortunately, thanks to his side project, Alfonzo never had the extra energy for a spar. So, Ritsu desires went unfulfilled.

"Well, there's always next time." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile while cold sweat flowed down his back.

'Doubt I'm strong enough to flip her switch, yet.' Alfonzo thought to himself. 'But on the off chance that I am, that sparring match would have turned into a death match real quick.'

"I suppose I can only look forward to the next time we meet, then." Ritsu replied with a gentle smile.

'Why does her smile look so terrifying right now?' Alfonzo wondered.

"Anyway, it's a good thing you managed to get your magic vehicle fixed." Tsunade said, cutting into the conversation. "Otherwise, you would have had to take the train."

As Tsunade said, Alfonzo was forced to remove the unstable lacrima from the Escalade's engine block by creating a lift with his magic and doing it the old-fashioned way. Otherwise, he, Cana, Wendy, and Carla would have had to take the train, since Cana rode the train to arrive in Cedar a week ago.

"*Sigh* Yeah, I didn't think I would have to do that while I was here." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile as he glanced at Cana, who was still chatting happily with Anko.

'If I had to guess, Cana intended to drive here. But she probably got too wasted before departure.' Alfonzo surmised. 'So, she had to sleep off her drunkenness/hangover on the train. I'd also put a lot of money on the fact that she wanted to drive anyway. But someone, probably Lici, made her take the train.'

"Anyway, it's about time for us to get on the road." Alfonzo said as he stretched out a hand towards Tsunade. "Allow me to thank you on behalf of all the Fairy Tail wizards who stayed here during this month for the wonderful hospitality."

"Oh please, think nothing of it." Tsunade said with a somewhat awkward smile on her face.

'I'm glad he never found out about how I lost the money to pay him.' Tsunade thought as she grasped Alfonzo's outstretched hand.

["She definitely lost the money she was supposed to pay you with on that one gambling trip."] Riot said at the same time.

'Yeah, I'm starting to think so, too.' Alfonzo replied internally. 'I mean, look at that smile. She looks like she'll start crying any second.'

["Yeah, but the real question is, how did she get the money to pay you back?"] Bedlam asked in a tone filled with curiosity.

With that, Alfonzo stopped to ponder as he released Tsunade's hand. Then, he caught sight of the smile Ritsu was sending her way.

'I see, so Master Unohana put up the money.' Alfonzo said to himself in an enlightened tone. 'And by the looks of it, Tsunade was punished severely for her fuck up.'

"Hey, Alfie!" Millianna, who had been waiting for the conversation between Alfonzo, Tsunade, and Ritsu to end, shouted excitedly. "Make sure to tell Erzie-Werzie I said hi, okay, meow?"

"I don't worry, I will." Alfonzo replied with a smile.

"It's too bad she couldn't stay longer, meow." Millianna said with her shoulders drooping.

"Well, if you're ever out on a mission around Magnolia, you can always drop in to see her, right?" Alfonzo asked with a smile.

"Ooh! That's right!" Millianna replied, regaining her energy in the process. "I'll definitely come visit next time."

As soon as Millianna was satisfied, Kagura was the next to approach Alfonzo.

"Also, tell Marin that I would like to face her in a spar the next time we meet." Kagura said in her usual emotionless tone.

"You want to face Marin?" Alfonzo asked in a puzzled tone. "I thought you'd want to face off against me or Mira, though."

"I'd like to test my skills against the She-Devil as well." Kagura replied. "Unfortunately, I don't think I've trained enough yet to face you. Especially after seeing that magic ray rip through the side of the ravine back then."

"Don't worry, Kagura." Ritsu said, patting Kagura on her shoulder as she did so. "You'll be there soon enough. Just be patient."

"Yes, Master." Kagura replied while bowing her head.

Before Alfonzo could say anything else, Anko jumped on him from behind with her arms wrapped around his neck.

"Hey, Alfonzo, when I come to visit Cana, you'll cook for me, right." Anko asked with a smile.

"*Sigh* Yeah, I guess." Alfonzo replied nonchalantly. "I mean, if you come to visit Cana, you'll be a guest in my house. So, I'll have to."

"Haha! Yes!" Anko said as she jumped off Alfonzo's back.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo noticed a glint in all the other ladies of Mermaid Heel's eyes. He would even swear that he heard the gears in their heads turning as they thought about who in Alfonzo's house, they could come to visit so that they could get some of his cooking.

"Alright, it really is time for us to go." Alfonzo said as he looked down at his watch. "I'd like to get home before dark."

"Alright, then you should go." Tsunade said while shooing Alfonzo away. "And if we have any problems with those training rooms, you can expect a letter requesting repairs."

"Got it." Alfonzo said as he turned towards the Escalade. "Alright, ladies, let's get on the road."

With that, Cana, Wendy, and Carla said their final goodbyes. Then, they all piled into the Escalade before Alfonzo pulled off without the trailer he pulled here from Magnolia.

As it turned out, that trailer was something Alfonzo made with his magic power and maintained for the whole trip. Then, when it was no longer necessary, he simply let it dispel.

A few minutes later, Alfonzo and the girls were on their way back to Magnolia.

"So, how was training with Master Tsunade?" Cana asked while looking back at Wendy.

"Exhausting." Wendy replied with a weak smile. "She crammed so much information about the human body into my head. Then, she taught me how to treat certain injuries, and made me practice each step until I got it perfect. On top of that, there was all the sparring."

"Yeah, I noticed the sparring." Cana said with a puzzled expression. "But what was that about? I mean, it's not like you need to know how to fight to be a capable healer, right?"

"To be a battlefield medic, you do." Carla replied. "Or at least, that's what that woman said."

"She says that a battlefield medic has to be the last one to go down." Wendy added. "Otherwise, having a healer on the team is meaningless. So, she wanted to make sure that I was capable of not getting hurt while out on a quest."

"Even if that makes sense, it sounds like overkill." Cana said with a wry smile. "I mean, how often are you gonna fight someone who can cause the ground to crater like that with a punch or a kick?"

"Well, in Master Tsunade's defense, that should make dodging attacks from just about anyone else much easier." Alfonzo replied, inserting himself into the conversation.

"I guess." Cana muttered, though it was clear that she still thought it was too much.

With that, the rest of the trip back to Magnolia continued with no problem. And about halfway through the trip, while Cana was sober, she switched places with Alfonzo and drove the rest of the way back. Meanwhile, Alfonzo and Wendy got some much-needed rest after a month of hard work.

Chapter 379: Taking a Shot in the Dark

"Fonzie should be back soon!" Elicia said happily while she and the rest of her group of friends sat around their usual table in the Fairy Tail guild hall.

"Yeah, I wonder if he got any stronger." Natsu added, just as excitedly. "Man, I can't wait to fight him when he gets back."

"Oh, you're looking forward to getting your ass kicked... again?" Gray asked in a derisive tone.

"What did you say?" Natsu asked angrily. "How 'bout I show you just how strong I've gotten since Alfonzo left."

"Bring it on, Flame Brain!" Gray shouted as he stood from his seat at the table.

"*Sigh* Some things never change." Mirajane said while shaking her head.

"Yeah, but at least you always know what to expect, right?" Lisanna asked while smiling at Natsu warmly.

At the same time, Natsu leapt over the table and punched Gray in the face. As a result, Gray was sent flying backwards, slamming into a table behind him.

"Come on! Can't you guys take your fights outside?" Macao asked while picking up Gray, who was covered in food and drinks, before throwing a punch of his own.

Luckily, Gray was not dazed by Natsu's punch or from slamming into the table. So, he easily evaded Macao's punch, causing it to sail past him and slam into Wakaba's jaw.

"Now you've done it, Macao!" Wakaba said as he returned a right hook, knocking Macao into another table.

Meanwhile, Natsu continued to rush towards Gray. However, instead of taking a hit, Gray ducked under Natsu's next punch before kicking him in the chest and sending him flying into the table Laxus, Bickslow, and Fried were sitting at. As a result, all the food and drinks on the table were sent flying.

"Damn it, Natsu." Laxus said in a threatening tone. "I was looking forward to that burger all day long."

And just like that, the guild hall was once again embroiled in a Fairy Tail-style brawl. Meanwhile, the conversation at the table where Elicia and the others were sitting continued like nothing happened. Though, the guys were eventually pulled into the brawl one by one.

"Speaking of Natsu never changing, how are things going between you and him, Lisanna?" Lucy asked curiously.

"*Sigh* I'm not sure." Lisanna replied, sounding somewhat forlorn. "I mean, whenever we're both in Magnolia, we spend a lot of time together. And we both really enjoy the time we spend together, too. But I'm not sure he sees me as a woman."

"Wait! Wait! Wait!" Elicia exclaimed in surprise, causing all those still sitting at the table to turn their attention towards her. "You're not waiting for Natsu to make the first move, are you?"

With that question, everyone's gazes switched from Elicia to Lisanna. Everyone except for Bisca's, that is. Instead, she turned her attention towards Alzack, who had just been drawn into the brawl when a mug of ale splashed all over the back of his head.

"Yeah, I mean, isn't that how these things usually work?" Lisanna asked in a confused tone.

"Seriously, Lisanna." Mirajane said while once again shaking her head. "You've been with the guild for at least seven years by now. And have you ever seen any of the relationships in this guild start because the guy asked first?"

Hearing that, Lisanna's eyes opened wide in realization as an enlightened expression made it onto her face. Bisca seemed to also share in the enlightenment, as well. Meanwhile, the other girls nodded in agreement with Mirajane.

"Um... Alfonzo asked me out first..." Lucy said while raising her hand meekly.

Lucy's statement caused Elicia, Ultear, Mirajane, and Marin to glare at her with a bit of envy.

"Wait, why are you glaring at me like that, too, Lici?" Lucy asked in a bewildered tone. "From what I heard, you and Alfonzo were always together, right?"

With that, not only Alfonzo's girlfriends looked at Elicia strangely, but everyone at the table did so, as well.

'Oh, crap!' Elicia exclaimed internally. 'I was thinking about how things were in our past life. Even after I was the only one left, after everyone abandoned him after his accident, I still had to ask Fonzie out.'

["Hahaha! Good luck explaining your way out of this one."] Scylla said while laughing uproariously from Elicia's inner world. ["I love seeing you end up in sticky situations after not thinking your actions through."]

'Shut up!' Elicia shouted back internally. 'Just help me get out of this.'

["Nope!"] Scylla replied energetically. ["This is way too much fun."]

Luckily, just at that moment, the front doors to the guild hall opened. And when they did, Alfonzo, Cana, Wendy, and Carla were standing in the open doorway.

"Fairy Tail! We're back!" Alfonzo shouted loud enough to be heard over all the commotion.

"Fonzie!" Elicia shouted as she stood up to escape the situation she found herself in.

Before Elicia could catapult herself towards Alfonzo, however, Natsu launched himself towards Alfonzo with his flames as propulsion.

"Haha! Alfonzo, fight me!" Natsu shouted with his right fist reeled back.

Then, without worrying about the three girls surrounding him, Natsu threw a punch with all of his might at Alfonzo.

In response, Alfonzo took a step forward while tilting his head to dodge Natsu's fist. Then, he threw his right knee into Natsu's abdomen, causing his body to bend around Alfonzo's leg, while stopping his momentum, completely.

"Gah!" Natsu grunted as the air was forced out of his lungs, his eyes bulged, and he spat out a mouthful of saliva.

Then, before Natsu could regain his bearings, Alfonzo raised his leg quickly, sending him upwards. Then, Alfonzo quickly lowered his leg, spun on his heel, and sent a side kick into Natsu's abdomen.

Bang!

In the next instant, Natsu was sent flying backwards much faster than when he approached, knocking aside all the tables, chairs, food, and drinks on his path, before slamming into the opposite wall.

"I'm glad you haven't been slacking off while you were gone..." Natsu said in a groggy tone as he slid down the wall.

Meanwhile, the rest of the brawl came to a stop after seeing Alfonzo's display of physical strength.

"What the hell?" Gray asked in a tone filled with disbelief. "He was supposed to be working, right? When did he have the time to get that strong? I didn't even feel him strengthen himself with magic power."

Little did the wizards of Fairy Tail know, ever since Alfonzo found out that subjecting himself to the Techno Organic Metal strengthened his body, he had been abusing that knowledge to strengthen his body, nonstop.

As a result, he was reaching the limit a magically enhanced body could reach. And when he added his magic power into the mix, the only one in the guild who could contend with him in terms of physical strength would be Gildarts. Though, Gildarts [Crash Magic] could still overwhelm his [Metal Magic] and [Electromagnetism Magic], for now.

"A welcome like that always lets us know we're back home, doesn't it?" Cana asked as she took a bottle of liquor out of her [Storage Card]. "Now, it's time to make up for lost time after driving for those four and a half hours."

"So barbaric." Carla said as she let her eyes wander over the guild hall.

"Yeah, but you wouldn't expect anything else from our guild, would you?" Wendy asked with a smile that let everyone know she was happy to be home.

"I suppose you're right." Carla replied with a huff while crossing her arms in front of her chest.

A moment later, a pink and blue blur slammed into Alfonzo before wrapping its arms and legs around his torso.

"Fonzie! Welcome home." Elicia said excitedly.

"Hey, Lici, I missed you." Alfonzo said with a warm smile.

A moment later, Ultear, Erza, Mirajane, Marin, Sun, and Lucy joined the group of new arrivals at the front doors of the guild.

"Uh... Why did all of you come over here?" Alfonzo asked in a confused tone. "You know that I would have come to you, right?"

"We're going home to celebrate your return." Sun said in a matter of fact tone. "Some of us haven't seen you in a month, you know."

Hearing that, Elicia, Ultear, Erza, Mirajane, Marin, and Lucy nodded their heads in agreement. Meanwhile Cana simply smiled without interrupting. Wendy and Carla, on the other hand, realized that they were basically being ignored. So, they decided they would go report to Ur before greeting everyone properly.

"Sorry to burst your bubble, but I need to report to Ur." Alfonzo said as he watched Wendy and Carla walk away. Then, with his expression turning to a scowl, he continued. "And I gotta give the guild their cut."

"Why do you have to give any money to the guild for something like this?" Cana asked, genuinely confused by the topic.

"It's because Mermaid Heel formally approached Fairy Tail for the job." Alfonzo replied. "And their cut is basically an intermediary's fee."

"That's kinda lame." Cana said with a frown.

"Yeah, it is." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "But what can I do about it?"

After that, Alfonzo's uncaring expression turned into one that would suit a greedy merchant. "Anyway, I gotta go report to Ur. I'll be back in a little bit."

With that, Alfonzo put Elicia down. Then, he started walking across the guild hall towards the elevator. And while he did, he returned the greetings to everyone who greeted him, as well.

"Hey, Alfonzo." Laxus said after ordering another burger.

"Yeah, what's up?" Alfonzo asked.

"When you get the chance, I want to spar." Laxus said. "I need to see if you've been slacking off while you were away."

"The way I sent Natsu flying wasn't enough proof?" Alfonzo asked with a chuckle.

"Of course not." Laxus said while shaking his head. "You could have done that before you left. I wanna see exactly how much you've grown since then."

"You make it sound like you're stronger than me, or something." Alfonzo replied with a grin. "But we both know that's not true."

"Hmph! We'll see about that." Laxus growled in annoyance. "Anyway, will you spar with me, or not?"

"Why not?" Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "Get at me tomorrow after morning training. Then, you can catch that ass whoopin' you're asking for."

"All you ever do is talk shit." Laxus said with a battle hungry grin on his face. "Why don't you put your money where your mouth is."

"Oh, a bet?" Alfonzo asked in apparent interest. "What do you have in mind?"

"If I win, I want you to make me one of those [Soul Armaments]." Laxus said with a grin.

Hearing that, Alfonzo raised an eyebrow. Since he planned on making [Soul Armaments] for the Dragon Slayers as an experiment, anyway, he did not mind making one for Laxus early, on the off chance that he was able to win his first fight in the fourteen years they've known each other.

"Sure." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "But what if I win?"

"What do you want?" Laxus replied confidently. "Just name your prize."

'Honestly, there's nothing Laxus can give me that I don't already have or can't get for myself.' Alfonzo thought to himself while he wore a contemplative expression.

"I guess I'll ask for a favor I can cash in whenever I want." Alfonzo said once he ended his contemplation.

"Sure." Laxus said. "Oh, and you can't use your [Soul Armament] during the spar."

"I figured." Alfonzo replied. "The fight was already one-sided enough. Don't want it to be a curb-stomp, right?"

With that, Alfonzo and Laxus grinned at each other with the thirst for battle in their eyes. Meanwhile, everyone else, who had overheard the conversation, decided that this was a battle they wanted to see. Though, they were unsure about why Laxus seemed so confident after all the times he had lost in the past.

The Thunder God Tribe were no exceptions, either. So, after Alfonzo finally got on the elevator, Bickslow, Fried, and even Evergreen, who had been sitting with Elfman before the brawl started, quickly huddled around Laxus to find out what made him so confident.

"So, what's the deal, Laxus?" Bickslow asked excitedly. "You must have come up with a new move, right?"

"Indeed." Fried added with a slight blush on his cheeks and a starry look in his eyes. "You must have found a way around Alfonzo's [Electromagnetism Magic] to be so confident. As expected of you, Laxus."

"Stop flattering him like a bunch of groupies. Let him speak." Evergreen cut in impatiently. "Now, don't keep us in suspense, Laxus. What's your new spell like?"

Hearing his teammates excited tones and expressions, Laxus could only scratch his head awkwardly.

"Honestly, I don't have anything new to show off." Laxus admitted in a slightly embarrassed tone. "I just wanted to see how strong he had gotten over the last month. And maybe get one of those [Soul Armaments] if I was able to land a lucky hit. Honestly, the combination of [Metal Magic] and [Electromagnetism Magic] is a bit too much for me to break through unless I learn another kind of magic."

With that, the table fell silent. After hearing how confident Laxus sounded when talking to Alfonzo, no one expected to hear something like that. So, Bickslow, Fried, and Evergreen, after exchanging glances, did the only thing they could think of in that situation.

Bickslow and Fried ordered food to replace the food that was wasted when the brawl started, while Evergreen went back to the table she was sitting at with Elfman. Then, all three went back to doing what they were doing beforehand, pretending like the conversation with Laxus never happened.

Chapter 380: Surprise Visitors

After accepting Lexus' challenge, Alfonzo entered the elevator before pressing the button for the top floor.

["I wonder why Lexus was so confident, this time?"] Bedlam asked curiously. ["Did you hit him too hard last time and he forgot all the times you kicked his ass over the years?"]

"I don't think so." Alfonzo replied while shaking his head lightly.

["Then what do you think it was?"] Bedlam asked.

["Maybe he awoke a trait as a masochist."] Riot replied with a sneer. ["He probably grew to like the feeling of getting beat up."]

Hearing Riot's hypothesis, both Alfonzo and Bedlam could not help but shudder.

"Dude, that's fucking disgusting." Alfonzo said with an uncomfortable expression on his face.

["Yeah, I feel kinda sick after saying it, too."] Riot replied. ["Let's just forget I said that, okay?"]

In response, both Alfonzo and Bedlam nodded their heads in agreement.

["Anyway, what do you think he's up to?"] Bedlam asked curiously.

"If I had to guess..." Alfonzo began to say. "He probably just really wants a [Soul Armament] of his own. But he's too embarrassed to just ask me for it. Especially if you consider the way he used to ask me for things in the past."

Hearing Alfonzo's thoughts on the matter, Riot and Bedlam nodded their heads in understanding. Before they could continue the conversation, however, the elevator reached its destination before the doors slid open.

As soon as the doors were opened, Alfonzo caught sight of Ur, sitting behind her desk, listening to Wendy and Carla report about their time at Mermaid Heel.

"So, you learned a lot under Master Tsunade, huh?" Ur asked with a smile.

"Yes." Wendy replied with a pleased smile and a nod. "I should be able to help a lot more if anyone gets hurt."

"That's good." Ur replied with a smile of her own.

"Plus, now Wendy can explode her [Sky Dragon Slayer] spells on impact, too." Carla added, sounding even more proud of Wendy.

"Oh, really?" Ur asked with interest in her tone and gaze. "I'd like to see that. You'll have to show me what you learned during tomorrow's training."

"Okay." Wendy replied as she clenched her fists in front of her chest. "I'll show you that I didn't waste the opportunity Alfonzo got for me."

"No one thinks you did." Alfonzo said as he approached Wendy and Carla from behind.

While Ur and Carla noticed Alfonzo's arrival, Wendy, who had been engrossed in her conversation with Ur, jumped after hearing Alfonzo's voice. However, before she could panic, Alfonzo patted her on her head, causing her to calm down quickly.

"Easy, Wendy." Alfonzo said as he removed his hand from Wendy's head. "It's just me."

"Oh, Alfonzo..." Wendy said as she began patting her chest with her right hand. "It's just you."

"And how did your trip go?" Ur asked with an amused smile. "I heard your little problem left."

"Yeah, Yoruichi and Sui-Feng went back to wherever it is they and Master Unohana came from." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "Something about Sui-Feng needing to be re-educated while Yoruichi would receive punishment from her clan, or some shit."

"I see." Ur nodded, having already heard that report from the other girls after Marin sent her letter. "But what is this about you poaching a member of Mermaid Heel's staff?"

"Oh, I hired a talented chef." Alfonzo replied nonchalantly. "She'll have more opportunities to grow her reputation if she works for me than she would at Mermaid Heel."

"Are you saying being your personal chef is a better job than working for a prestigious guild?" Ur asked with confusion in her tone.

"OH, that's right, I didn't tell you yet, huh?" Alfonzo asked with a sheepish grin. "You know that new company, Sixth Sense Holdings? Yeah, I'm the owner and CEO. I'm looking for someone to take over as CEO, though."

Hearing that, not only Ur but Wendy and Carla also dropped their jaws. They had all heard about Sixth Sense Holdings. But no one knew who the owner was. Though, in hindsight, it made sense that Alfonzo was its owner. It specialized in selling all the things he had patents for, after all.

Naturally, being the most experienced, Ur was the first to regain her bearings.

"Are you looking to sell any shares of the company?" Ur asked with the smile of a greedy merchant. "I'm sure having Fairy Tail as one of the shareholders would be great for business, wouldn't it?"

"We can talk about that later." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "Anyway, I'm here to give my report about my time at Mermaid Heel."

"Yeah, I guess that's the more important topic at the moment." Ur replied as she let her merchant-like smile slip away.

With that, Alfonzo explained that he had completed the work he was commissioned to do. Then, he handed Ur the guild's cut. Though, when she tried to take it from his hand, Alfonzo's fingers tightened around the wad of cash subconsciously.

"*Sigh* This feels like highway robbery." Alfonzo said as he finally released the cash.

"That's just the way it works." Ur replied with a shrug.

A moment later, however, Alfonzo wore a smile similar to the merchant-like smile Ur wore a few minutes ago.

"By the way, while I was installing the training rooms for Mermaid Heel, I found a way to make the gravity chambers safer." Alfonzo said. "Now, I can make it so that the effects of the heightened gravity only affect organic material in the range of the sigils, leaving the air untouched. Interested in having the guild's facilities upgraded?"

Hearing that, Ur's eyebrows began to twitch as she glanced down at the wad of Jewels in her hand.

"You can't just let the guild have this, can you?" Ur asked as she put the money in her hand away. "Anyway, how much are the upgrades and how much will they take to implement?"

Meanwhile, Wendy and Carla could only watch on in disbelief. They never expected that Alfonzo would have already found a way to get the money he had to hand over to the guild back.

"He really isn't willing to take a loss, is he?" Carla asked while continuing to watch Alfonzo and Ur.

"I guess you have to have a mindset like that if you want to be that strong." Wendy added while once again clenching her fists in front of her chest.

"Anyway, do you know when Gildarts will be back?" Alfonzo asked a moment later. "It's been a while since I sparred with him. And I wanna see how much I've grown."

"Nope, no clue." Ur replied with a shrug. "But he should be back within the next two months."

"I hope he's back in time." Alfonzo muttered quietly enough that no one could hear him clearly.

"What did you say, Kid?" Ur asked curiously.

"Don't worry about it." Alfonzo replied while waving off Ur's question. "You'll find out soon enough. Anyway, I'm gonna go home. I wanna sleep in my own bed."

"Go ahead, you've earned it." Ur said with a smile.

With that, Alfonzo nodded at Ur, Wendy, and Carla before turning around. Also, Wendy and Carla, having completed their reports, decided to follow Alfonzo back down stairs, too.

"Oh, before you leave, I received a letter from the old man." Ur said, stopping Alfonzo before he reached the elevator.

"The old man?" Alfonzo asked as he turned around. "You mean, Gramps?"

"That's right." Ur said as she rifled through one of her desk drawers. Then, after finding the letter in question, she set it on top of the desk. "Apparently, Blue Pegasus, Quatro Cerberus, Lamia Scale, and, surprisingly, the Village Hidden in the Leaves, have made requests to have some of the same training facilities installed."

Hearing that, Alfonzo's expression fell.

"And let me guess..." Alfonzo said as he faced Ur. "You accepted all their requests, didn't you?"

"Of course." Ur replied with a nod. "Strengthening ties with our allies is a good thing, after all."

With that, the room fell into silence while Alfonzo stared into Ur's eyes unblinkingly.

"Is there a problem?" Ur asked in a confused tone.

"*Sigh* You do know that I'm a wizard before being a magic item crafter, right?" Alfonzo asked in an exasperated tone. "Just installing four of those training rooms took a month. And depending on the scale, this could take a really long time. So, how am I supposed to have time to take quest?"

Hearing that, Ur actually began to flush in embarrassment. She actually had not even considered that point. She was actually only concerned with gaining income for the guild, strengthening the bonds with their allies, and making a bond with a new ally, the Village Hidden in the Leaves.

"*Sigh* I'm sorry about that, Alfonzo." Ur replied in a genuinely remorseful tone. "I honestly was only thinking about the guild as a whole and how this would be a good thing for the guild. But I didn't consider your opinion on the matter."

Hearing that, Alfonzo's expression relaxed. He knew that Ur had no bad intentions, but he felt as if he had to remind Ur about his status as an S-Class wizard.

"Either way, they'll each be sending a representative to discuss the matter in the next few months." Ur continued. "But once this is all over, I'll make sure to talk to you about it before I accept any more requests."

"I guess that's all I can ask." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "At least I can space out the appointments."

With that, Alfonzo, Wendy and Carla finally made their way out of Ur's office. Meanwhile, Ur, while watching the young wizards disappear behind the closing elevator doors, could only shake her head.

"It's only been a few years, and he's changed so much." Ur said as she leaned back in her chair.

"Although he's still unyielding about getting paid for the work he does, he doesn't jump at the chance to make money anymore. Well, when you get as rich as he is, I guess that will happen, huh? Even so, I can still remember when I came to him about getting that leg made. His eyes lit up so brightly..."

Little did Ur know, Alfonzo was more excited about creating the leg than the money he would get for it.

"... and I can still remember the face he made when Gray suggested that he do it for free, too." Ur continued as she chuckled at the memory. "But now, he stays so calm when the topic of making money comes up. It's amazing how much ten, or so, years can change someone."

With that thought spoken aloud, Ur leaned forward again before pressing her hands against her desk.

"*Sigh* I'm too young to be reminiscing like some old lady." Ur said as she pushed herself out of her chair. "I should go and spend time with my wizards."

Getting to that point, Ur could not help but smile.

"Maybe I'll start calling them my children in a few years like the old man did." Ur said as she walked around her desk and headed towards the elevator.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo, Wendy, and Carla had just reached the guild's main hall. And only a few moments after stepping out of the elevator, they saw a little girl, about six years old running in their direction.

"Alfonzo!" Elicia, Maes Hughes' daughter, shouted as she ran towards Alfonzo. "You're back!"

A moment later, with a smile on his face, Alfonzo scooped up Elicia and held her in his arms.

"Hey little Elicia, did you miss me?" Alfonzo asked.

"Uh huh." The little Elicia nodded emphatically. Then, she looked at Alfonzo with sparkling eyes. "Did you bring me a souvenir?"

Hearing that, Alfonzo could not help but laugh. Meanwhile, Wendy and Carla looked at this scene with soft smiles.

"I did." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "Go get Romeo and come meet me out by the Escalade."

"Okay~~~!" The little Elicia replied happily.

Then, Alfonzo put the little girl in his arms back on the floor and watched as she ran off to find Romeo.

"Alfonzo, when did you have time to buy souvenirs?" Wendy asked curiously.

"Oh, one day when you were training with Master Tsunade, I took a trip to Cedar." Alfonzo replied as he started walking towards the front doors. "And I saw some things I thought those two would like."

Curious to see what Alfonzo bought for the younger children, Wendy and Carla followed him outside.

A few moments later, Alfonzo was standing behind the Escalade with the trunk open and searching through his luggage. Not long later, two six year olds, Elicia and Romeo ran out of the guild hall and stopped next to Wendy and Carla.

"Alfonzo, what did you get us?" Romeo asked in an excited tone.

Looking back, Alfonzo saw Romeo and Elicia watching him with excitement and anticipation shining in their eyes.

"First, this is for you, Romeo." Alfonzo said as he handed a soft package to Romeo.

Taking the package quickly, Romeo looked up at Alfonzo with a question in his eyes.

"Go ahead, you can open it." Alfonzo said, answering Romeo's unasked question, with a smile.

Immediately, Romeo ripped the packaging open. And when he did, he found an orange scarf with a scale like pattern stitched into it.

"Whoa! It's just like Natsu's!" Romeo shouted excitedly before quickly wrapping the scarf around his neck.

"And what about me?" Elicia asked impatiently.

Reaching into the same piece of luggage, Alfonzo pulled out a rectangular package before handing it to Elicia. Then, without even asking with her gaze, Elicia ripped it open excitedly.

"A book?" Elicia said in a confused and somewhat disappointed tone.

"It's a book about magical beasts." Alfonzo said with a smile, having expected Elicia's reaction to some degree. "Since you're learning the [Arc of Embodiment], I thought you would like to be able to make your own magic beast friends."

At the thought of having her own magical beast companions, Elicia's eyes, which had started to dim after seeing the book, lit up once again. Then, she started flipping through the book to see pictures of the different magical beasts.

"Elicia, what do you say?" Maes, who had followed his daughter outside asked in a slightly reprimanding tone.

"You, too, Romeo." Macao said in a much more severe tone.

"Thank you, Alfonzo!" Romeo and Elicia shouted happily before turning around to show their fathers their gifts.

Meanwhile, Gracia, Maes wife, made her way over to Alfonzo.

"You really---" Gracia began to say.

"I know I didn't have to." Alfonzo said, cutting off Gracia. "But I wanted to. So, you don't have to worry about it."

"Lt. Colonel? Gracia, Elicia?"

Before the conversation between Alfonzo and Gracia could continue, the voice of a young man could be heard from the direction of the town.

Looking back, a short young man with long golden blond hair tied in a braid, a tall man wearing a suit of armor, and a young woman with long, light blonde hair and dark blue eyes approached from the distance.

"Ed? Al? Winry?" Maes asked after looking up when he heard his old title. Then, after recognizing the new arrivals, he smiled as he continued. "What are you three doing here?"