

Fairy Tail 381

Chapter 381: The Elric Brothers

"Ed? Al? Winry?" Maes asked in a confused tone after he was called. Then, after catching sight of the new arrivals, he smiled as he continued. "What are you three doing here?"

Hearing what her father had to say, the little Elicia also turned around. And when she saw the three people, Winry Rockbell, and the Elric Brothers, she smiled brightly. Then she took her new book from her father's hands and rushed over to Winry.

"Big Sis!" Little Elicia shouted as she ran over to Winry, much faster than a six year old little girl had any business to move. "I missed you!"

"Elicia... You're so..." Winry muttered in confusion.

A moment later, just as she was about to jump into Winry's arms, Alfonzo appeared next to the little Elicia and caught her, stopping her in her tracks.

"Huh?" Elicia exclaimed in confusion. Then, after looking around for a moment, she noticed that Alfonzo was holding her. And with a slight pout, she continued. "Alfonzo, what are you doing? I wanna hug Big Sis."

"Elicia, I don't mind you hugging your big sis, but you were using your magic power to move just now." Alfonzo said as he put Elicia down. "You know you have to be careful."

Hearing that, the little Elicia's eyes widened in surprise. Then, she looked at Winry apologetically.

"Sorry, Big Sis, I wasn't being careful." The little Elicia said in a sincerely apologetic tone.

Meanwhile, the new arrivals, Edward 'Ed' Elric, the short young man, Alfonse 'Al' Elric, the man in the large suit of armor, and Winry looked at Alfonzo in shock.

"Hold on a minute... Did you say she was using magic power?" Edward asked in disbelief. "But she's just a normal little girl."

"Nope, her magic power was just never discovered." Alfonzo replied while patting Elicia on the head. "She's actually quite the talented little wizard."

"Ehehe." Elicia giggled under the head patting and praise.

"Anyway, it's been a while, Winry." Alfonzo said, turning his head towards Winry. "How ya been? Got any better at making Automail?"

Snapping out of her daze at the fact that Elicia was now a wizard in training, Winry's eyes lit up when Alfonzo asked her about Automail. Then, she yanked Edward by the arm and pulled him in front of Alfonzo.

"Ed, take off your coat and let him see your arm." Winry ordered.

"And why the hell should I do that?" Edward asked indignantly. "I don't even know this guy."

"You don't know Alfonzo Marcus?" Winry asked in disbelief. "He's only the most famous magic item crafter on Ishgar."

"I don't think that's what he meant, Winry." Alphonse said, standing up for his brother. "I think he meant that he's never met him."

"So, why does that matter?" Winry said uncaringly. "I need to show him that the Automail I crafted is better than the one he's wearing."

"Huh? What are you talking about, Winry?" Edward asked in a confused tone while shaking off Winry's grasp. Then, once he was free, he pointed his left index finger at Alfonzo's arms, which were on full display because he was wearing a short-sleeved shirt, as he continued. "He doesn't have any Automail. What are you trying to compare it to?"

Hearing that, Winry came to a complete stop. Then, she mechanically turned her head towards Alfonzo, paying extra attention to his arms.

"Ahh~~~~~! What happened to your arm?" Winry shrieked in horror. "Where did that beautiful piece of Automail go?"

Hearing that, Edward and Alphonse stared at Winry with weird expressions, though no one could see Alphonse's face thanks to the armor's helmet and face guard. At the same time, Maes and Gracia looked at Alfonzo with similarly strange expressions. Meanwhile, Macao, the only one of the onlookers who knew the whole story about Alfonzo's arm, could only smile wryly.

"Winry, are you feeling okay?" Edward asked as he reached up to feel Winry's forehead. "Why the hell do you think he should have Automail? His arms look just fine to me."

At the same time, Maes looked at Alfonzo with a confused gaze. In response, Alfonzo mouthed the phrase, "I'll tell you later," before continuing to watch the interaction between Winry and the Elrics.

Smack!

Before Edward could touch her forehead, Winry slapped his hand away in annoyance.

"Don't talk to me like I've lost my mind, Ed." Winry said angrily. "I met him more than three and a half years ago, and he had an Automail left arm back then."

Hearing that, instead of showing an expression of understanding, Edward wore a guilty expression.

"**Sigh* I really should be more careful with my arm from now on." Edward said in a tone filled with self-blame. "She clearly has to spend too much time repairing it. I mean, she must be totally exhausted. Otherwise, there's no way she would be this delusional."

"Um... Brother..." Alphonse said warily when he felt the atmosphere around Winry change.

Before Alphonse could warn his brother any further, however, a large wrench, whose origin no one could explain, appeared in Winry's right hand. Then, while Edward continued to lament her fate from overworking, Winry slowly and deliberately raised the wrench over her head before...

"Ed! You idiot~~~~~!" Winry shouted.

Bang!

... swinging the wrench down on Edwards head with all her might. As a result, Ed fell to the ground with blood flowing down his face.

A moment later, Alphonse appeared next to his brother, just as what looked to be Edward's soul seeped out of his mouth. Then, Alphonse somehow managed to catch the soul before pushing it back into Edward's mouth, something that all the characters originating from the Fullmetal Alchemist Franchise did not seem to pay attention to in the slightest.

However, when Macao saw Alphonse handle what appeared to be a soul with his hands, his eyes almost popped out of their sockets.

"Ugh... I think I should cut back on the alcohol." Macao said while rubbing his temples. "I'm starting to see shit that should be impossible. Anyway, let's head home, Romeo, it's about time for you to go to bed."

"But I don't wanna go." Romeo said with a pout. "I wanna show Natsu my new scarf."

"Fine, go show him." Macao said, waving Romeo towards the guild hall. "But after that, we gotta get you to bed."

"Okay~~~!" Romeo shouted happily as he ran back into the guild hall, followed by Macao at a much slower pace.

"It's almost time for you to go to bed, too, Elicia." Gracia said a moment later.

"But I wanna play with Big Sis." Elicia whined.

"Well, if it's okay with your mom, I can come and stay at your house tonight." Winry said with a doting smile on her face.

Hearing that, the little Elicia quickly turned towards her mother with anticipation written all over her face.

"Of course, Winry, you're always welcome in our home." Gracia replied with a smile of her own.

After hearing her mother's response, the little Elicia's face lit up with happiness. Then, with her new book in one hand, she grabbed Winry's hand with the other. Then, she started pulling her towards the town to take her to the Hughes residence.

"Come on, Big Sis!" The little Elicia shouted energetically. "Let's go, I'll show you our house! It's so big."

Surprisingly, Alfonzo did not have the urge to retort with "that's what she said" or anything with similar effect when he heard the little girl's exclamation.

Meanwhile, Winry could only smile helplessly as she allowed herself to be dragged away by the energetic little Elicia. Similarly, Gracia wore a helpless smile, as well, as she followed the two from behind.

"It looks like things are going well for you, Lt. Colonel." Alphonse said after tending to Edward, who was no longer bleeding from his head.

"Yeah, after retiring from the military, you even look younger than before." Edward added with a chuckle as he picked himself up from the ground.

Instead of responding to Edward and Alphonse's pleasantries, Maes expression hardened after seeing that his wife, daughter, and Winry were no longer within earshot.

"Although I'm sure that you boys were genuinely concerned with my well-being." Maes said while adjusting his glasses. "I'm sure that's not why you're here. And if I had to guess, it's probably because of the homunculi, right?"

Like Maes, the atmosphere around Edward and Alphonse also changed once Maes exposed their reason for making the trip to Magnolia.

"Well, if you want to know about them, I'm really not the one to ask." Maes continued. "After all, the only interaction I had with them was when they tried to kill me."

Hearing that, Edward's eyes widened while Alphonse's whole body stiffened.

"Luckily, Alfonzo here saved me." Maes said with a smile as he glanced back at Alfonzo, who was closing the trunk of the Escalade.

Hearing that, Edward and Alphonse shifted their gazes to Alfonzo.

"So, if you want any more information about them, you should ask him or a couple of his fiancées." Maes added. "It was them who fought and killed two of them, after all."

Hearing that two of the homunculi had been killed Edward and Alphonse showed even greater degrees of shock. At the same time, however, they looked at Alfonzo skeptically. They had both fought the homunculus before, after all. So, they knew just how hard it was to kill a homunculus for real.

"Well, I guess they don't wanna talk to me." Alfonzo said with a shrug after a few moments. "I mean, they've just been staring for a while. So, I'm gonna go home, Hughes."

That statement was enough to snap Edward and Alphonse out of their dazes.

"How did you manage to kill one of them?" Edward asked skeptically.

"I shot him into orbit." Alfonzo replied casually with a shrug.

That response caused the Elric Brothers to look at him even more skeptically.

"But getting something into orbit needs a lot of force." Alphonse replied after a moment. "It would need to be moving at, at least, twenty-two times the speed of sound to reach escape velocity."

"Well, I use both [Metal Magic] and [Electromagnetism Magic]." Alfonzo replied, completely unbothered by the Elric's skepticism. "Besides, it wouldn't be the first time I've sent something out of the planet's atmosphere, either. I mean, didn't Winry tell you how I dealt with that metal causing the virus in your hometown?"

"To be honest, that story sounded a bit too farfetched." Edward replied. "And it still does."

"Yeah, I guess without seeing it for ourselves, it's just hard to believe." Alphonse added.

Shrugging his shoulders in reply, Alfonzo turned back towards the guild hall.

"Well, there's nothing I can do about that, for now." Alfonzo said as he started walking back towards the guild hall. "Anyway, I've been working on a job for the last month and I'm fucking exhausted. If you wanna talk about the homunculi, you guys can come see me and the others later. But for now, I'm gonna go get my girlfriends and go home. I miss my bed."

Hearing Alfonzo mention his girlfriends, Edward wore a look of jealousy on his face. Not that he was jealous that Alfonzo had more than one girlfriend, though. Instead, he was jealous that he was about the same age and still single.

"Oh, and your little pink-haired admirer is in the guild hall, Ed." Alfonzo said while waving his hand. "Oh, it's alright if I call you that, right?"

"Uh... Sure." Edward replied with a confused expression on his face. "But who are you talking about?"

"A girl named Meredy." Alfonzo replied. "She said she met you in Dublith when Al was kidnapped by that Homunculus, Greed. And she hasn't stopped gushing about you since then."

Hearing that, the light of realization flashed across Edward's eyes. At the same time, he recoiled slightly.

"Oh, I heard about her crush in my time here, too." Maes added with a teasing smile. "So, what's the deal with that? Does Winry know?"

"Shut up, Lt. Colonel!" Edward shouted in response.

"Aww, don't be like that, Ed." Maes said as he approached Edward. Then, he threw an arm over Edward's shoulder as he continued. "Come on, tell me. What do you think of our little Meredy? She's one of the guild master's favorites. You could get some real good backing if you were to hook up with her."

After saying that in a teasing tone, Maes' expression hardened.

"But if you do, don't play with her heart." Maes continued in a solemn tone. "Trust me, you don't want that angry ice lioness hunting you down for making that little girl cry."

"Stop it, Lt. Colonel." Edward replied while pushing Maes away. "It's not like that."

Meanwhile, as Maes continued to tease Edward, neither of them noticed the depressed atmosphere Alphonse was exuding.

"*Sigh* I really want my body back." Alphonse muttered to himself while squatting down and drawing circles on the ground with his finger. "I'm never gonna be able to get a girlfriend with a body like this."

Chapter 382: Finally Back Home

After leaving Maes, Edward, and Alphonse to chat, Alfonzo made his way back into the guild hall. Then, without wasting much time, he found Elicia and the girls, letting them know that he was going home. Immediately afterward, the girls told their friends that they would be going home as well. Then, the group of nine left the guild hall while chatting happily.

A few moments later, when the group was outside, Elicia's eyes lit up when she saw the trio of Maes, Edward, and Alphonse chatting happily. Then, she looked over to Alfonzo, making eye contact in the process.

Nodding in response to Elicia's gaze, Alfonzo then turned towards Sun.

"Oh, Winry's in Magnolia, Sun." Alfonzo said with a smile.

Hearing that, Sun's eyes began to sparkle. Then, she took a step forward and wrapped her arms around Alfonzo's right arm.

"Where is she?" Sun asked excitedly. "And how come she didn't come in to say hi?"

"That's because she ran into little Elicia." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "Then, she got pulled away to stay at Hughes' house."

"Oh..." Sun replied in slight disappointment.

"Don't worry, Sun." Alfonzo said, combing his fingers through Sun's hair as he spoke. "I'm sure you'll get a chance to see her before she leaves."

"That's right." Sun replied, her mood picking up quickly.

"Besides, that's the Ed and Al Winry and Granny Pinako were talking about back then." Alfonzo continued, pointing his finger at Edward and Alphonse.

Hearing that, Sun turned her head towards the chatting trio. Then, she stopped to think about what she could remember from the conversations she had with Pinako and Winry more than three years ago. A moment later, a proverbial light bulb lit up over Sun's head as her eyes widened.

"Oh, he's the one Granny Pinako said would need a step stool to get onto a chair at the kitchen table, right?" Sun asked innocently.

Immediately, a tick mark appeared on Edward's head. Then, he ignored his conversation with his brother and Maes while glaring at Sun.

"Don't call me short!" Edward shouted indignantly.

Meanwhile, the other girls in the group, who, at the very least, were four inches taller than Edward, who stood at 4'11", couldn't help but giggle at the explosive reaction.

"Why should you get upset at her for calling a spade a spade?" Cana asked with a smirk as she stood up straight and looked down at Edward.

"Indeed." Erza added, though her tone held no teasing. "Height is not the measure of a man. Instead, his actions will dictate his stature."

Considering those words came from Cana and Erza, who were 5'11" and 5'9", respectively, Edward looked as if he was about to explode in anger.

"Ed, you have to calm down." Alphonse said as he placed his hands on Edward's shoulders.

"*Sigh* I know, Al." Edward replied while taking deep breaths.

Meanwhile, after he spoke, the girls shifted their attention to Alphonse, who stood at 7' tall in his armor.

"Wow, he's even taller than Elfman." Mirajane said in a shocked tone.

"Yeah, that's a pretty tall guy." Marin said while looking up at Alphonse. "But what's up with that armor? It must be hot in this heat."

"Yeah, who wears armor like that in the summer?" Ultear asked curiously.

Hearing that, Alphonse began to panic internally. Outwardly, however, he did not show much reaction.

At the same time, Alfonzo and Elicia exchanged glances once again. And during that brief eye contact, they had a short conversation.

Alfonzo: "I guess they're not using [Magic Power Detection]."

Elicia: "Guess not. If they were, they'd be looking at Al much differently."

Alfonzo: "Yeah, they'd only be able to see that [Soul Seal] on the inside of his armor. Other than that, there's no body."

Elicia: "I wonder what will happen when they finally notice, though."

Alfonzo: "I'm sure we'll find out sooner or later."

As Alfonzo and Elicia alluded to in their short conversation, the inside of Alphonse's armor is empty. Several years ago, after being trained in [Alchemy] by their master, Izumi Curtis, who Ultear and Meredy met back when they went to the town of Dublith, the Elric Brothers performed a forbidden [Transmutation] to resurrect their deceased mother.

Unfortunately, the [Transmutation] failed. As a result, Edward lost his right leg as compensation for the failed attempt. Meanwhile, Alphonse lost his entire body. However, they were both provided with a great deal of alchemical knowledge as compensation by Ankhseram, the God of Life and Death, who could not allow the cycle of life and death to be tampered with.

In fact, Ankhseram never wanted to compensate the alchemists who broke this taboo. However, because alchemists follow the law of equivalent exchange, he was required to compensate the alchemists for what they lost as punishment for breaking the taboo.

On top of all the knowledge they receive as compensation, all alchemists who survive their attempts at [Human Transmutation] gain the ability to use alchemy without the need to draw a [Transmutation Circle]. Instead, they only need to form a circle with their hands to [Transmute], using themselves as the [Transmutation Matrix].

Still, despite the pain Edward must have been in after losing his right leg, he quickly noticed that Alphonse was nowhere to be seen after the failed [Transmutation]. Then, with the determination to not lose the last member of his family... Or rather, those he considered family, Edward shoes to sacrifice his left arm to anchor his brother's soul to the suit of armor everyone saw now.

"The big guy's fashion choice aside, I think we should get going." Elicia said with a smile while wrapping her arms around Alfonzo's free arm. "We need to welcome Fonzie back properly."

Hearing that, the seven other girls nodded their heads excitedly. Then, they started dragging Alfonzo towards the Escalade.

"Oh, we almost forgot." Cana said as she put her hand on the Escalade's back door. "Wendy and Carla's luggage should still be inside, right?"

"That's right." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile. "I guess I should take them home, first. So, how about you all go back to the house? Then, I'll come by after dropping them off."

"I'll come with you." Ultear said, opening the passenger door as she spoke.

"Sure, if you want to." Alfonzo replied as he turned around. "I'll go get Wendy and Carla."

With that, the other seven ladies shrugged simultaneously as they watched Alfonzo go back to the guild hall. Then, they all said their goodbyes to Maes before walking off towards the mansion.

Meanwhile, Maes, Edward, and Alphonse just watched them leave.

"Those are his girlfriends?" Edward asked in astonishment.

"Yeah..." Maes replied with a wry smile. "He's got some luck with the ladies, huh?"

"Yeah." Edward replied.

"And you can't even confess to Winry." Maes continued with a teasing smile.

"Ye--- Wait! Why do I have to confess to Winry?" Edward asked explosively while blushing furiously.

"Oh, come on, Ed." Maes said, throwing his arm over Edward's shoulder again. "It's obvious to everyone. We can all see that the two of you like each other."

"Huh?" I-I don't know what you're talking about." Edward replied while quickly looking away.

"He's right, Brother." Alphonse added. "If you make her wait too long, she's gonna find someone else."

"Like I said, I... don't... know... what... you're... talking about..." Edward said as he watched Alfonzo return from the guild hall with Wendy and Carla in tow.

While he stammered out his words, Edward remembered how Winry would brighten up any time she talked about Alfonzo. Then, he gritted his teeth.

Luckily for Edward, Winry and Alfonzo just shared similar interests. So, he did not need to worry about Alfonzo stealing Winry's heart. However, he did not know that. As a result, he felt an extremely uncomfortable feeling in his chest.

"Hey, guys." Alfonzo said as he drew near. "If you wanna talk, I'll be available after training and kicking someone's ass tomorrow. Hughes should know the time frame. So, ask him to tell you about it."

"Sure." Alphonse replied. "We'll come to talk to you tomorrow, Alfonzo."

"Cool." Alfonzo replied as he opened the back door for Wendy and Carla. Then, he continued as Wendy and Carla climbed into the back seat. "Well then, I'll see you guys later."

With that, Alfonzo closed the back door. Then, he made his way to the driver's seat. A moment later, the engine roared to life and the Escalade pulled off.

Meanwhile, Maes and the Elric brothers watched the Escalade's tail lights move further into the distance.

"That's a pretty cool magic vehicle." Alphonse muttered.

"Yeah, and from what I've heard, he built it by himself... from scratch... almost nine years ago." Maes replied.

Hearing that, Edward and Alphonse looked at Maes with disbelieving expressions on their faces.

"And how old is he now?" Edward asked, finally snapping out of his thoughts about Winry.

"He just turned twenty last month." Maes replied. "Damn... I wish he had parties at his house more often. I really wanna taste his cooking again."

Seeing Maes' expression devolve into that of a starving man, Edward and Alphonse were taken aback. Still, they managed to stay on topic.

"If he just turned twenty, wouldn't that mean he built those things when he was only eleven?" Alphonse asked in an incredulous tone.

"Yeah, I guess that's right." Maes replied as he wiped the drool from the side of his lips.

"What kind of monster is that guy?" Edward asked as he looked in the direction the Escalade drove towards. "Everything I hear about him is making me think he's not really human."

"Yeah, I know what you mean." Maes replied, his expression turning solemn. "And the way my little Elicia is drawn to him, I'm thinking he's some kind of incubus. I really need to try harder to protect her from his evil hands."

Hearing that, the Elrics looked at Maes strangely. Then, they just decided to ignore his overprotective nature. And eventually, Maes snapped back to the here and now.

"Anyway, you two are welcome to stay at our place too, you know." Maes said, smiling welcomingly at the brothers. Then, he started wagging his eyebrows suggestively. "And since we only have one guest room, you can share it with Winry, Ed."

Hearing that, Edwards face reddened immediately. Meanwhile, Alphonse would have rolled his eyes if he could. Especially since he had no doubt that Winry would be spending the night in little Elicia's room. In fact, if Maes' comment had not flustered him so much, Edward would have realized that, too.

"No, I think we'll find a hotel." Edward replied, his reply much stronger than intended. "So, you can just show us to a good one, okay."

"Sure." Maes replied with a shrug and a smile. "If that's what you wanna do, who am I to stop you?"

With that, Maes turned towards the town and started walking.

"I'll make sure to come by and get you so you can watch those guys train." Maes said. "When you see it, I swear it will blow your mind."

"Really?" Alphonse asked curiously as he and Edward followed Maes. "What kind of training do they do?"

Like that, Maes, Edward, and Alphonse chatted all the way to the best hotel in Magnolia. Then, after the Elrics got checked in, Maes made his way back to his house.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo and Ultear had returned to the mansion. And to Alfonzo's surprise, Lucy had moved in after she returned from Mermaid Heel. So, now there was only one guest room available on the second floor.

'It's a good thing I finished the new place.' Alfonzo thought to himself after realizing that almost all the rooms were full. 'I won't have to worry about guests once I bring it over here.'

["And what are you gonna do with this place?"] Bedlam asked curiously. ["Sell it?"]

'That's not a bad idea, actually.' Alfonzo replied. 'Now that Ur's the guild master, I think she'd like to have a more luxurious place. I mean, that little three-bedroom place she's got now seems a little...'

["Yeah, it doesn't feel like somewhere a guild master would live."] Bedlam said with a nod.

["If the old man were here, I bet he'd jump at the opportunity to buy it."] Riot added. ["But since he spends most of his time in Era, now, I don't think he would be all that interested."]

'Yeah, I bet he hates me and Ur for that, huh?' Alfonzo replied while chuckling internally.

"You should go get cleaned up." Ultear said, ending Alfonzo's conversation with Riot and Bedlam after she and Alfonzo walked through the kitchen. "I'm sure you'd like to take a shower and a bath after such a long trip."

"Yeah, I think I'll do that." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "A dip in the hot tub sounds like a fucking great idea right now."

In response, Ultear smiled. Then, she accepted a quick kiss before heading upstairs to get herself cleaned up, as well.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo made his way into the master bedroom where Elicia was already taking a shower. Wasting no time, Alfonzo quickly took his clothes off and threw them in the hamper. Then, like Elicia, he started the shower and began washing himself.

"Erza, Marin, and Lucy told me about your little secret." Elicia said with a smile. "They said it was some kind of surprise."

"Yup, it's something you should look forward to." Alfonzo replied as he lathered his body.

"Don't you wanna give me a little hint?" Elicia asked in a seductive tone.

"Nope." Alfonzo replied simply and conclusively.

"Tch! You're no fun, Fonzie." Elicia replied as she turned off the shower.

"Don't pout like that, Lici." Alfonzo replied with a wry smile.

"I know, I know." Elicia said as she grabbed a towel. "I'll be good and wait for the surprise like a good girl."

"Good." Alfonzo replied in a relieved tone. "I didn't wanna have to start threatening to not cook if you kept asking."

"Fonzie, you're so mean." Elicia said in a huff. "Anyway, take your time relaxing. The rest of us will make sure to welcome you home properly when you're done."

"Alright." Alfonzo replied with a smile.

After that, Elicia walked out of the bathroom while switching her hips seductively.

A few minutes later, after washing up properly, Alfonzo rinsed off and turned off the shower head.

"Damn, I forgot to turn on the bath." Alfonzo muttered as he made his way over to the bathtub.

To his surprise, however, the bathtub was already full. On top of that, when he reached his hand into the water, it was the perfect temperature.

"I guess Lici did this before she started taking her shower, huh?" Alfonzo asked himself.

["I guess she's trying to make up for her mistake by being more attentive."] Bedlam replied.

["And that just proves Lici is the best."] Riot said enthusiastically.

Deciding to ignore the squabble that started thanks to Bedlam calling Riot a simp again, Alfonzo stepped into the bathtub before getting comfortable. Then, he started the [Water Magic Jets] and laid his head back on the side of the tub.

"Ah~~~. It feels good to be back home." Alfonzo said as he closed his eyes.

About forty-five minutes later, the girls, who had gathered in the master bedroom, came into the bathroom to check on Alfonzo. And to their surprise, they found him fast asleep in the tub. Frustrated that their plans did not come to fruition, they worked together to get him out of the bath and put him to bed. At the same time, they all found his totally defenseless sleeping face cute.

Then, all eight girls climbed into the bed and slept around Alfonzo, happy that he was finally back.

Chapter 383: Doing What Should Be Impossible

The next morning, just before sunrise, Edward Elric, who had booked a hotel room with his brother, Alphonse, slowly opened his eyes.

"Good morning, Brother." Alphonse said while sitting cross-legged on the other bed in the room.

"*Yawn* Good morning, Al." Ed said as he wiped his eyes with his right hand. "What time is it?"

"The sun should rise soon." Alphonse replied as he moved to sit on the edge of his bed. "You should probably get cleaned up. Lt. Colonel... I mean Mr. Hughes should be here soon."

Last night, before parting with the Elrics, Maes made sure to correct their term of address. Since he was no longer a member of the kingdom's military, he asked them to stop calling him, Lt. Colonel. He asked them to call him Maes, instead.

However, as an elder both Edward and Alphonse respected, they could not bring themselves to call him by his first name. So, they opted to call him Mr. Hughes, instead.

"Yeah, I know." Edward said as he pushed himself up from the mattress. We're supposed to go and watch the wizards of Fairy Tail train today. And that Alfonzo guy said he was going to have a fight with someone after that, right?"

"That's right." Alphonse replied with a nod. "And to be honest, I'm really curious about the way they train. I wonder how different it is from the way we train."

"Yeah, I'm kinda curious as well." Edward said as he finally got out of bed. "Besides, I want to see how strong that guy really is. I mean, there are a lot of rumors about him floating around the kingdom. ON top of that, someone who claims that he could send something into orbit should be pretty strong, right?"

"You'd think so." Alphonse replied.

With that, Edward reached his luggage, pulled out a change of clothes, and made his way towards the bathroom.

"Anyway, I'll get washed up real quick." Edward said as he pulled the bathroom door open. "Then, we can wait for Mr. Hughes and maybe have breakfast together."

A moment later, Edward closed the door behind him, leaving Alphonse to wait while he got washed up.

About half an hour later, Edward and Alphonse were making their way down to the hotel's dining room. However, just as they finished climbing down the stairs, they caught sight of Maes, who was waiting near the stairs for them with a smile.

"Hey, boys, good morning." Maes said as he straightened up and approached the Elrics. "Were you about to have breakfast?"

"Good morning, Mr. Hughes." Edward replied. "That's right."

"Did you come to join us?" Alphonse asked.

"Sort of." Maes replied with his smile widening. "I came to bring you to have one of the best meals you'll ever have in your lives."

Hearing that, both Edward and Alphonse looked at Maes skeptically. On top of that, Alphonse was giving off an envious aura. Since, for obvious reasons, he would not be able to partake of such a meal.

"Now, don't look at me like that, Al." Maes said, his smile turning wry as he spoke. "You'll be able to add it to that list of things to eat once you get your body back."

"Yeah... I guess." Alphonse replied.

"Anyway, let's go." Maes said as he turned around. "Let's go before it's too late."

With that, Maes led Edward and Alphonse out of the hotel. Then, they made their way to the Fairy Tail guild hall.

"Seriously?" Edward asked as the trio approached the guild hall. "You brought us here?"

"Hey, trust me, Ed." Maes said with a smile. "You'll thank me for this later."

A moment later, Maes, Edward, and Alphonse entered the guild hall. And Edward and Alphonse were thoroughly flabbergasted when they did. For no other reason than the fact that there was a brawl going on when they arrived.

"What the hell is going on?" Edward asked in shock.

"Oh, don't worry about that." Maes said with a shrug. "This happens at least four times a day."

Hearing that, Edward and Alphonse turned incredulous gazes towards Maes. Meanwhile, Maes was scanning the guild hall for the person he was looking for. Then, when he finally found him, he raised his voice over the ruckus.

"Hey, Alfonzo, I wanna use my points!" Maes shouted loudly. "I need two meals for breakfast."

In fact, since Maes doesn't go on quests, it should actually be impossible for him to accumulate points. However, as a member of Fairy Tail, Alfonzo and Ur thought it would be unfair if that were the case. So, they worked out a deal that he would get points equivalent to an A-Class quest per week. And if he damaged any guild facilities during a brawl, his points would be deducted at the same rate as the other wizards in the guild.

"Oh, are you going to treat the boys to breakfast, Maes, Darling?" Gracia said, approaching the three men from behind with Winry and a sleepy Elicia in tow. "I think they would love Alfonzo's cooking."

Hearing the words, "Alfonzo's cooking," the little Elicia's sleepiness was blown away. Then, she looked at her father expectantly. Even Winry, who had not tasted Alfonzo's cooking since he stayed in Resenbool for the Techno Organic Metal quest, had her eyes light up, as well.

Turning back when he heard Gracia's voice, Maes was just in time to see the change in little Elicia and Winry's expressions. Then, with a wry smile, he turned back towards the guild hall.

"Actually, better make that four meals, Alfonzo!" Maes shouted.

"Got it!" Alfonzo shouted over the ongoing brawl while slapping aside Jet, who was sent flying towards him as he walked towards the kitchen. "*Sigh* Can't these guys wait until after breakfast to start fighting?"

With that, while Alfonzo made his way into the kitchen, Maes led Winry, Gracia, little Elicia, Edward, and Alphonse to a table that had not been knocked over during the brawl and took their seats. And just like the Elric brothers, Winry was thoroughly confused at the sight of the brawl that was taking place.

"Winry!" Sun shouted just as the group of six took their seats.

Hearing the familiar voice, Winry smiled as she turned her head towards the voice. At the same time, the other five also looked in the voice's direction.

And when they did, they saw Sun approaching. Though, she was dodging between all the flying attacks with a level of grace that made it look like she was dancing.

"Oh, she's pretty good." Edward said.

"Yeah, she's making it look easy while moving through all this chaos." Alphonse added.

"Big Sis, do you know Big Sis Sun?" Little Elicia asked curiously.

"Yeah, she and Alfonzo came to my house for a quest a while ago." Winry replied as she stood up from her seat at the table.

"She's the girl that called me short last night." Edward muttered while glaring at the approaching Sun.

"Technically, she only repeated what she heard from Granny." Alphonse replied.

A moment later, Sun had arrived by the table. Then, without hesitation, she pulled Winry into a hug.

"It's been a long time, Winry!" Sun squealed happily.

"Yeah, it really has." Winry replied, sounding just as happy. "How have you been?"

"Great!" Sun said with a smile. "I was even a candidate for the S-Class exam last year."

Like that, Sun and Winry continued to chat, pausing briefly so that Winry could place her order for breakfast. However, their happy conversation was cut short when a plate came flying from the brawl, smashing apart on the side of Sun's head.

Immediately, Sun's atmosphere changed. Then, with her head lowered and her bangs covering her eyes from view, she turned towards the ongoing brawl.

"Hey, Winry, I'll be back in a few minutes." Sun said in a menacing tone. "I need to give some of those guys a piece of my mind."

"Oh... Okay." Winry replied, clearly taken aback at Sun's change.

A moment later, Sun charged into the battle while Winry, Edward, and Alphonse watched blankly. And when they saw Sun bulldozing through the other brawling Fairy Tail wizards, they did not know how to react.

"Go, Big Sis Sun!" Little Elicia cheered happily as she watched the brawl.

Meanwhile, Maes and Gracia could only watch with wry smiles.

Eventually, Alfonzo, with a metal platter floating behind him, arrived at the table. Then, he placed a plate in front of each of the group of six.

"Hey, Hughes." Alfonzo greeted with a smile. "Since you were treating our visitors and didn't wanna use up all your points, I threw in breakfast for you and Gracia, too."

"Really?" Maes said while looking down at his plate with surprise.

"Yeah, but don't tell anyone, got it." Alfonzo added with a smile. "I don't wanna deal with the hooligans in our guild if they ever found out. And you know if they start pestering me, things will get even worse than what's going on right now, right?"

"Don't worry, we won't say anything." Maes said in a solemn tone. "But still, thanks for doing this, Alfonzo."

"Don't mention it." Alfonzo replied while waving off Maes thanks. Then, he turned to Alphonse, who he knew would not be able to eat the food on his plate, and leaned close to his helmet. "I already know you don't have a body in there, Al."

Hearing that, Alphonse stiffened instinctively. Unbothered by Alphonse's reaction, Alfonzo continued.

"I've actually done a lot of research on the soul in the past few months." Alfonzo said. "On top of that, I've also done a lot of research on giving people their senses back with my Automail. So, don't ask any questions, for now. Just pretend to eat the food somehow, trust me, you'll thank me for this."

With that, Alfonzo patted Alphonse on the shoulder before he walked away. At the same time, Alfonzo made a slight modification to Alphonse's armor with his [Metal Magic].

"Alphonse, are you okay?" Edward asked with concern while switching between looking at his brother with concern and glaring at Alfonzo's retreating back. "What did that guy say to you?"

"He knows..." Alphonse muttered. "but how?"

Hearing that, Edward narrowed his eyes. Then, he glanced at Hughes, who was engaged in conversation with Gracia while eating his food.

Meanwhile, Winry, watched her childhood friends with concern after seeing their reactions to what Alfonzo whispered to Alphonse.

"Hey, are you gonna eat?" Maes asked while subtly eyeing Alphonse's plate, knowing that he would not be able to eat it. "You don't wanna let the food get cold, do you?"

Snapping back to the here and now, Edward turned his attention to the plate in front of him.

"We can talk to him about that later, Al." Edward said as he picked up his fork and knife. "For now, I wanna see if all the hype was worth it."

"Yeah..." Alphonse said blankly. Then, he remembered what Alfonzo said about pretending to eat the food. "I guess I'll just give it a try. It's not like poison can hurt me with a body like this."

Then, Alphonse picked up a fork and the plate in front of him, surprising all those who knew his secret, before turning his back to the table and facing the wall. A moment later, after a bit of hesitation, Alphonse raised the face guard on his helmet before shoveling the food into his empty suit of armor.

"Alphonse, what are you doing?" Edward asked in a worried tone with his first forkful of food inches away from his mouth.

"Oh my, I think this is the first time I've ever seen Al eat something." Gracia said in surprise. "Usually, he eats away from the eyes of other people."

Meanwhile, the little Elicia simply ate her breakfast happily. But Winry and Maes were just as confused as Edward. However, before they could question Alphonse any further, Alphonse had already finished his plate of food and flipped his face guard back down. Then, with the plate still in his hand, he stood up explosively.

"It's so good!" Alphonse shouted, loud enough to be heard over the ongoing ruckus in the hall.

Hearing Alphonse's loud shout, the brawl stopped momentarily. Then, they realized that the one shouting was one of the people who came in with Maes and realized that it must be that guy's first taste of Alfonzo's cooking. So, they simply returned to the brawl without missing a beat.

Gracia and Elicia, on the other hand, were surprised by Alphonse's loud shout. However, they simply smiled knowingly in response. At the same time Winry, Maes, and Edward were completely confused.

However, Maes recovered quicker than the others, only because he was made aware of the guild's exclusive detection spell, [Magic Power Detection], after joining the guild officially. So, he was able to piece together that Alfonzo had done something to make it so that Alphonse could taste the food. Though, he had no idea what he could have possibly done.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo had finally reached the table where he and his friends usually sat. Though, he did have to knock out a few people on his way. Then, when he took a seat, Elicia jumped over the table and sat down next to him.

"Did you just do what I think you did, Fonzie?" Elicia asked incredulously.

"Yeah, I did." Alfonzo replied with a smile as a plate lowered itself in front of him from near the ceiling.

"How does that even work?" Elicia asked curiously.

"I'll tell you about it later." Alfonzo replied while raising a finger to his lips. "I don't think everyone knows yet."

Hearing that, Elicia looked around and noticed that Laki, Levy, Mirajane, Bisca, and Marin, who had not participated in the brawl, were looking at her and Alfonzo with curiosity. Then, she simply nodded her head as she pulled her plate over to her new seat with her threads.

Meanwhile, after realizing that Alfonzo and Elicia were not going to continue their conversation, the other girls clicked their tongues in disappointment before they continued to eat their own breakfasts.

And just like that, breakfast continued peacefully... Well, as peacefully as a breakfast at Fairy Tail could.

Chapter 384: You Only Had to Ask

After the brawl came to an end and everyone finished breakfast, the wizards of Fairy Tail all headed upstairs to train in the guild's training facilities. Meanwhile, Maes led Edward and Alphonse upstairs, as well, to observe the way the Fairy Tail wizards train. More specifically, to watch the way the wizards Alfonzo and Elicia lead in training.

"These training rooms are pretty sturdy." Edward said while knocking his Automail fist on one of the walls in the training room. "This place must have cost a fortune."

"Yeah, if I'm not mistaken, the walls should be an adamantine/orichalcum alloy." Alphonse added while examining the walls, as well. "But with their properties, that should be almost impossible."

"Well, they call Alfonzo the Master of Metals for a reason, you know." Maes replied.

"I guess." Edward replied as he turned his attention to the center of the training room. "But it doesn't really look like they're doing anything different than any other person I've seen training."

Like Edward said, the people in the training room, Alfonzo, Elicia, Cana, Laki, Alzack, Mirajane, Bisca, Marin, and Sun, were going through what appeared to be basic training. For example, Alfonzo was going through his weapon forms with his tonfa. Meanwhile, Elicia was doing a gymnastics routine.

"Yeah, that's what it looks like from the outside." Maes replied with a smile. Then, he pointed at a device near the training room's entrance. "But if you take a look at that, you'll see just how insane their training is."

Following the direction of Maes finger, Edward and Alphonse looked towards the device. And when they did, they both looked on in disbelief.

"Does that thing say that they're training at thirty times normal gravity?" Alphonse asked in a disbelieving tone. "That should be impossible."

"Well, when circulating magic power through the body, there's a lot you can do." Maes replied. "Or... that's what those guys say, at least. I mean, I wouldn't know. I don't have enough to circulate."

"That means I should be able to train like that, too." Edward muttered.

"Theoretically." Maes replied. "But if your body isn't strong enough to handle it, it could be pretty dangerous. I've seen one of the guys pressed to the floor because he rushed into the gravity field without knowing how high it was set."

Then, Maes pointed towards a line that was carved into the floor and ran around the training room.

"Speaking of which, don't step past that line." Maes said. "Everything inside of it is affected by the heightened gravity."

"Yeah, but even if their bodies are strong enough to handle the pressure, it's still pretty dangerous, isn't it?" Alphonse asked curiously. "I mean, the difference in air density could lead to sudden suffocation, right?"

"Well, they've spent a while getting used to that." Maes replied as he turned his attention to the training wizards. "But that won't be a problem for long. Apparently, while Alfonzo was installing new training facilities in the Mermaid Heel guild hall, he found a way to exclude the air from the effects of the high gravity. And he'll be upgrading all the training facilities after today's training is over."

"How is that possible?" Edward asked with his brows furrowed. "That should be physically impossible."

"Well, magic can do all sorts of crazy stuff." Maes replied with a shrug, clearly not understanding the mechanics behind such a thing.

Like that, Maes, Edward, and Alphonse continued to chat while the wizards of Fairy Tail continued to train. Then, around lunch time, the training for the day came to an end. And with the end of the training, the gravity, which had been cranked up to forty-five times normal gravity by the end of training, had been switched back to normal, as well.

"After seeing them train like that, I guess it makes sense that Fairy Tail is the strongest guild in the kingdom." Edward said.

"Yeah, I couldn't imagine training under such high gravity." Alphonse added.

"Anyway, why don't we head downstairs and grab some lunch." Maes said with a shrug. "Unfortunately, it won't be as good as breakfast, though. I don't have enough guild points for that."

"I'm okay with anything." Alphonse said, sounding rather energetic. "I'm just glad I can taste again."

"Yeah... I'm still curious to know how he did that." Edward said. Then, he narrowed his eyes. "More importantly, how did he know about Al's condition."

"I'm sure he'll talk to you about that later.' Maes said.

"Yeah, he said he would." Alphonse added. "Besides, he might be able to give you the feeling back in your left arm, Brother."

"As nice as that sounds, Winry is my Automail mechanic." Edward said while shaking his head. "And I won't wear anything unless she's the one who made it."

"Oh ho!" Maes exclaimed in a teasing tone. "I bet Winry would be happy to hear just how loyal you are."

Immediately, Edward looked away awkwardly while he blushed. Before he could retort, however, the training room's door was opened abruptly.

"Alright, let's go, Alfonzo." Laxus said confidently. "It's time for our fight."

"*Sigh* Are you really so eager to get your ass kicked again, Laxus?" Alfonzo asked with a smile. "If you are, I'm happy to grant your wish."

"Enough talk, just come with me to the tenth floor." Laxus said through gritted teeth. Then, he turned around and walked back through the training room's door. "Unless you're scared of losing."

With that, everyone in the room looked at the open training room door with blank gazes.

"Man, Laxus is really putting it on thick, huh?" Alfonzo said while shaking his head with a wry smile on his face.

"It's almost like he's forgotten how many times he's lost over the years." Cana added.

"He's probably just hoping to land a lucky hit to get a [Soul Armament]." Laki said as she towed off.

"Still, I doubt Alfonzo will lose." Alzack said with a shrug. "I mean, unless Laxus learned something new."

"I can only hope." Alfonzo said as he headed towards the training room's door. "It will be more fun that way, after all."

A moment later, Alfonzo stopped his steps next to Maes and the Elric Brothers.

"You guys can come and watch, if you want." Alfonzo said. "After that, we can sit down and talk. And since you want to probably keep things secret, we can head over to my place to talk. If that's fine with you, that is."

"Sure." Edward replied. "I wanna see how strong you guys really are, anyway."

"Yeah, this should be interesting." Alphonse added. "We heard about the match between you and Laxus a few months ago in Sorcerer Weekly. So, seeing you two fight in person might be good for us."

"If you can keep up." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "But since we both handle lightning, it might be hard to follow."

"Don't underestimate us." Edward said, clearly proud of his strength. "We're no pushovers."

"That's not what I meant, but whatever." Alfonzo said with a shrug. "Oh, and there's a good chance everyone watching will find out about your secret, Al. So, you should think twice."

"Huh?" Alphonse exclaimed in confusion.

"It's thanks to a detection spell our guild uses." Alfonzo continued. "It's the only way most of the guys in the guild can follow a fight between me and Laxus."

With that, Alfonzo walked away, leaving the training room shortly afterwards. Meanwhile, both Edward and Alphonse turned their gazes towards Maes.

"Is that true?" Edward asked suspiciously.

"Yeah, it's true." Maes replied with a nod. "They have the ability to track people by the flow of their magic power, or magic power signature, as they call it. But since Alphonse doesn't have a body to flow magic power through, they'll all know something is up."

Hearing that, Edward's expression turned hesitant.

"But I wouldn't worry about it if I were you." Maes continued with a shrug. "Although you might get a few questions about it, no one will pry into how it happened. And even if they knew, I don't think they would care. They're a band of ruffians and hooligans, after all."

"What did you say about us, Hughes?" Cana, with a liquor bottle in hand asked as she walked by. "That's offensive, you know."

In the next second, Cana unleashed a massive belch that echoed down the hallway.

"See what I mean.?" Maes said with a smile. "Ruffians and hooligans that are hard to dislike."

"I see." Edward said as he watched the rest of the wizards leave the room. Then, he turned towards Alphonse as he continued. "Well, it's up to you, Al."

"I believe Mr. Hughes." Alphonse replied after a moment of consideration. "I mean, anyone who would start a bar brawl like they did this morning, probably wouldn't care about our circumstances."

"That's right, Al." Maes said with a smile. "And if you were to join the guild, they would do everything in their power to help you get your body back, too. They consider everyone in the guild family, after all."

"We can think about that later." Edward said after a few moments of contemplation. "We should probably hurry to the tenth floor if we don't wanna miss the fight."

With that, Maes, Edward, and Alphonse put their conversation on hold. Then, they rushed over to the elevator, which had a line forming in front of it for all the people who wanted to watch the fight between Alfonzo and Laxus.

Eventually, all those who were interested in the fight, which made up almost all of the guild, Winry, Edward, and Alphonse, were gathered in the large training room on the tenth floor.

"This seems dangerous." Alphonse muttered as he looked around at all the people in the room. "It's surprising this many people can fit in here and still have space for a ring, though."

"Oh, that's because Fonzie used a bunch of space expansion seals in this room." Elicia, who happened to be standing next to the three visitors said.

"You're Elicia Taylor, the Magic Seamstress!" Winry shouted excitedly. "I love your clothes."

"Thanks." Elicia replied with a smile. "Since you came to visit, you should come by our house and let me make a few pieces for you."

Hearing that, Winry's face lit up happily. A moment later, however, she deflated just as quickly.

"*Sigh* I don't have the money for any custom pieces." Winry said in a downcast tone.

"Since I invited you, it's obvious they'll be free of charge." Elicia said with a smile. "Besides, since you're friends with Sun, I'd be happy to make a few things for you."

"Seriously?" Winry asked excitedly. "Thank you. Thank you so much."

"Don't worry about it." Elicia replied. "You have no idea how much I love making clothes. And since you're so pretty, I'm sure they'll look great on you."

"You two can talk about clothes later." Maes said, interrupting the conversation with a wry smile. It looks like they're about to get started."

And just as Maes said, both Alfonzo and Laxus were engulfed in arcs of lightning, with Alfonzo's in a violet color and Laxus in yellow. Then, they both vanished from where they stood in a burst of speed. An instant later, Alfonzo ducked a straight punch covered in lightning. After that, there were only a few people in attendance that could follow the action with their eyes.

"This is insane." Edward said in a shocked tone. "And I thought I was fast. But those two are on another level."

Before anyone could respond to Edward's utterance, Laxus cast his [Lightning Dragon's Roar] in Alfonzo's direction. Instead of trying to take it head on like he did in the tournament, Alfonzo opted to avoid it. However, because they were standing behind Alfonzo, Winry, Edward, and Alphonse found themselves terrified.

Before leaving the ring, however, a translucent barrier appeared around the ring, as a result, the [Lightning Dragon's Roar] simply fizzled out upon contact.

"*Pant* *Pant* I saw my life flashing before my eyes just now." Winry said while patting herself on the chest.

"Yeah, I thought we were about to get roasted." Edward chimed in.

Although Alphonse didn't say anything, he had a similar feeling to Winry and Edward.

Meanwhile, Elicia, after hearing Winry and Edward's comments, could not help but shoot an accusatory glare in Maes' direction.

"Sorry, I forgot to tell them about the barrier." Maes said with a sheepish smile while scratching the back of his head. "But yeah, Alfonzo took everything into account when he built this place. Or... That's what I've heard, anyway."

After hearing Maes apology, Winry, Edward, and Alphonse stared at him with aggrieved expressions. A moment later, however, they turned their attention back to the fight.

"I don't even know why I'm watching this." Winry said. "I can't even tell what's going on most of the time."

"Yeah, neither can I?" Maes replied with a shrug. "But the atmosphere makes it fun."

Hearing that, Winry, Edward, and Alphonse took a moment to take in the reactions of the other people watching the fight. And to their surprise, most, if not all, of them looked like they were following the fight.

"I guess they're all using that detection spell you talked about, huh?" Edward said.

"That's right." Maes replied.

"Looks like the show is about to end." Elicia said, pulling the others out of their conversation. "Fonzie won again."

Just as Elicia finished speaking, Alfonzo avoided Laxus' [Lightning Dragon's Iron Fist] before grabbing Laxus outstretched wrist and creating an anti-magic bracer around his forearm. Then, with a quick spin, he threw Laxus over his shoulder, slamming him into the floor before jabbing an Eskrima stick towards his throat, only to stop it less than an inch before it struck.

"You still have the bad habit of overextending when you think you've won, Laxus." Alfonzo said as he pulled his weapon back.

"I'm still not even sure how you caught me." Laxus grumbled as he sat up.

"Visible light." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "I made it look like my hand was further away by bending the visible light."

"Damn it." Laxus muttered. "I had [MPD] active, too. But it's still hard to ignore what my eyes are telling me."

"Anyway, you lose." Alfonzo replied. "So, I get to ask you to do one thing for me, no questions asked."

"I know." Laxus grumbled as he stood up. "So what is it?"

Instead of answering immediately, Alfonzo walked toward the spectators. Towards Elicia to be specific. At the same time, Elicia reached into one of the pockets in her skirt. Then, she pulled out four pendants, that she handed to Alfonzo.

"Thanks, Lici." Alfonzo said with a smile and a nod.

Now, with the pendants in hand, Alfonzo turned back to Laxus. Then, he tossed one of the pendants at the Lightning Dragon Slayer, confusing him greatly.

"What I want you to do is tell me what kind of [Armament Spirit] comes from that." Alfonzo said with a grin. Then, he tossed the other three at Natsu, Gajeel, and Wendy. "And that goes for the three of you, too."

"Wait, if you were gonna give me one of these, why the hell did we even have this fight?" Laxus asked in a disbelieving tone.

"You should ask yourself that question, Laxus." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "I mean, if you wanted one, all you had to do is ask. Banking on landing a lucky hit to get one was pretty stupid."

With that, Laxus could only look at Alfonzo dumbfoundedly. Meanwhile, Natsu, Gajeel, and Wendy were overjoyed at the opportunity to have their own [Soul Armaments].

'I wonder if the dragons inside of Natsu, Gajeel, and Wendy will end up as their [Soul Armament Spirits].' Alfonzo mused. 'And if they do, what kind of release states will they have. And if they don't, will their [Spirits] have draconic features? And then there's Laxus, a second generation Dragon Slayer. I'm so curious to find out about what will come of this.'

Chapter 385: Magic Destroys the Laws of Physics

Shortly after Alfonzo passed out the four [Soul Armament Embryos], the training room went into an uproar. And the reason was simple, all the wizards present wanted their own [Soul Armament]. Especially after seeing Alfonzo, Elicia, Erza, and Marin training their [Partial Release States].

Unfortunately, Alfonzo had no intention of handing them out to anyone who was not at least an S-Class candidate, other than Marin. So, if they wanted to have their own, they would have to work hard and qualify for the S-Class exam.

Eventually, the uproar died down. Then, everyone filed out of the training room to do whatever it is they do when they're done with training. Whether it be taking a quest, getting a meal, or just hanging out at the guild hall.

Alfonzo, on the other hand, was one of the last people to leave the training room. And when he did, he found a few people waiting for him outside the training room's door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting." Alfonzo said as he, Elicia, and Sun, the last three people in the training room, walked through the door.

"We didn't wait for long." Alphonse replied. At the same time, he noticed Sun staring at him with a strange expression on her face. "Um... Is something wrong?"

"Not really... But..." Sun replied in an unsure tone. "Are you controlling that armor remotely?"

With that, the hallway fell silent.

Just like Alfonzo told him earlier, everyone in the training room to watch Alfonzo's fight against Laxus noticed the fact that his armor was empty. And while most people were fine with letting it be, there would be a few curious people who would ask him a few questions.

"*Sigh* No, because of an accident, this is my body... for now." Alphonse replied. "But my brother and I are working to get my body back."

Listening to this conversation, Winry, Maes, and Edward were curious to see how Sun would respond. Though Winry, who had met Sun before had an idea, and Maes was pretty sure he knew exactly how she would respond after spending the last few months as a member of Fairy Tail. Edward was the only one who was really worried about the reply.

But when they saw Sun's expression change into one filled with sadness, Edward and Alphonse were completely taken aback.

"Alfonzo, is there anything we can do to help him?" Sun asked with tears threatening to spill from her eyes.

While Alfonzo began combing his fingers through Sun's hair and Elicia wrapped her in a hug, Winry and Maes wore expression that said: "As expected." Meanwhile, Edward and Alphonse were completely caught off guard.

Although the Elric brothers were used to people showing sad expressions after hearing their story, Sun had not even heard their story. Just knowing about their condition saddened her. On top of that, she wanted to help them, not just offer them words of encouragement.

"I probably could." Alfonzo replied. "Or at least I could give him some ideas. But that's only if he's willing to tell me his story. But I doubt he is willing to do that. At least not for now."

"Yeah, I'm sure it's not something you'd just tell anyone you meet, after all." Elicia added. "But as long as he asks for help, I'm sure Fonzie would do everything in his power to do so."

Hearing Alfonzo and Elicia's responses, Sun shifted her gaze back and forth between them and Alphonse for a few moments. Then, she wiped the tears from her eyes and smiled at Alphonse.

"If you ever ask for it, we'd be willing to help in any way we can." Sun said with a bright smile.

Meanwhile, Edward could only stare at Alfonzo skeptically. He and Alphonse had spent years trying to return their bodies back to normal. Yet, they had been unable to find anything. Other than using a Philosopher's Stone, that is. But that was something they were unwilling to use due to its method of production.

Naturally, Alfonzo and Elicia noticed Edward's gaze. And they could understand his skepticism. However, because they knew the Fullmetal Alchemist canon, they actually did know how to get Edward and Alphonse their bodies back. They even had an idea about how to take it a step further and get Edward his leg back, too.

However, there is no way they could tell them that. Not up front, anyway. Instead, they would have to make it look like they had pondered it for a while. And only after they had heard the brother's story from their mouths, too.

"Anyway, I think we've been standing around here for long enough." Alfonzo said, putting an end to the awkward atmosphere. "Why don't we head back to our house to have a chat?"

"Okay, you two can go with them." Maes said. "I've got some work to take care of for Master Ur."

"Sure." Edward replied while still looking at Alfonzo skeptically. "I've got a lot of questions for Alfonzo, anyway."

"Sure." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "And I'll answer all those that I'm willing to with full sincerity."

While Maes smiled at the way Alfonzo formulated his response, Winry giggled after seeing Edward's irritated expression. Meanwhile, Alfonzo, Elicia, and Sun could feel a helpless aura from Alphonse as he looked at his brother.

Then, the group of seven made their way to the elevator and took it down to the first floor. And while Alfonzo, Elicia, Sun, Winry, Edward, and Alphonse left the guild hall, Maes ordered a drink, feeling he would need one to deal with all the paperwork and reports he had to sift through.

About fifteen minutes later, Alfonzo, Elicia, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun returned to their home with Winry, Edward, and Alphonse accompanying them. The other girls, such as Ultear, Erza, and Lucy had left right after training ended to take quests.

And while Erza and Lucy went with the rest of Team Natsu, minus Wendy and Carla, who wanted to take a few days to recover from her month-long trip to Mermaid Heel's Headquarters, Ultear took Meredy on a magical beast subjugation quest.

Though, Ultear had to practically drag Meredy out of the guild kicking and screaming after she found out that her crush, Edward, had come to visit.

"Alright, Lici, why don't you and the girls give our guests a tour of the house." Alfonzo said as soon as everyone was in the mansion, and he had shut the front door. "Meanwhile, I'll get lunch started. Then, we can all gather for lunch before doing what we all came here for."

"Sure." Elicia replied energetically. Then, she turned to Winry, Edward, and Alphonse before she continued. "Just let us get changed and we'll give you the grand tour."

"Sounds good to me." Winry replied with a smile.

Meanwhile, Edward and Alphonse seemed unbothered by the wait, as well.

And with that, Elicia, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun left to get changed in their own bedrooms, leaving Alfonzo, Winry, Edward, and Alphonse in the front hall.

"Well, you guys can follow me to the kitchen while you wait." Alfonzo said as he turned towards the kitchen. "Any requests for lunch?"

"Anything's fine with me." Winry said. "I mean, everything you make is delicious."

"Same here." Alphonse replied. "I'm just happy I can taste food again."

"Speaking of that..." Edward said as he and the other two followed behind Alfonzo. "How does that even work? More importantly, why can't I smell the food Alphonse emptied into his armor this morning?"

"Oh, it's an application of my research on souls and Automail." Alfonzo replied as the group reached the kitchen. Then, while putting on his apron, Alfonzo continued. "Since I wore Automail for a short while, I looked into adding the senses into prosthetics. And with the right combination of sigils, I found a way to make it possible. Then, after delving into it some more, I figured out how to add the other senses with seals, if necessary. The only one I can't do is sight."

"Because the eyes are connected directly to the brain, right?" Edward asked as he, his brother, and Winry took seats at the kitchen table.

"That's right." Alfonzo replied as he finished tying the straps to his apron. "And as confident as I am in my abilities, I'm not confident enough to mess around with someone's brain."

"I know what you mean." Winry added. "If Ed had lost an eye, I don't think there's anything I could do about it."

"Not that you wouldn't try to figure out how." Alfonzo said in a teasing tone.

"That's right.' Winry replied with a strong nod.

A moment later, both Winry and Edward froze with blushes on their faces. And after seeing that, Alfonzo couldn't help but laugh. Meanwhile, Alphonse only shook his head.

'It really is obvious to everyone but them, huh?' Alphonse thought to himself.

"Aww, damn... Your reactions were funny." Alfonzo said after getting his laughter under control.
"Anyway, back to the topic. Either way, it amazes me how some of these wizards specializing in [Healing Magic], not that there are very many of them around, can transplant eyes or all together create new ones."

"Yeah, it doesn't seem all that scientific." Alphonse replied.

"That's the thing about magic, though." Alfonzo said with a smile. Then, he created an arc of violet electricity that he let bounce between the fingers of his raised right hand. "It basically tells physics, chemistry, and the other laws of the world to go fuck themselves. But at the same time, knowing all that stuff can make magic even more potent."

"Yeah, yeah, magic is amazing." Edward said. "But you still haven't finished telling us how you made it so that Al can taste food again."

"Oh, that's right." Alfonzo replied as he turned towards the refrigerator. "By the way, do any of you want a drink? I've got water, juice, something I've created called soda, and milk."

At the mention of milk, Edward's face scrunched up in disgust. Noticing that, Winry looked at him sternly.

"You really need to get over this childish dislike of milk, Ed." Winry said in a reprimanding tone. "Why do you think you haven't grown up?"

"It's not my fault milk tastes like vomit." Edward replied, still wearing his disgusted facial expression.

Meanwhile, as Winry and Edward continued to bicker about drinking milk, Alphonse latched onto something else Alfonzo said.

"Soda?" Alphonse asked curiously. "What's that?"

"A soda is a drink made with different flavorings and carbonated water." Alfonzo replied. "And before you ask, carbonated water is just water with carbon dioxide dissolved into it. As a result, it gives the drink a fizzy feeling when you drink it."

Hearing that, Winry and Edward also ended their bickering as they found the concept interesting. Then, the three guests decided to try a soda. So, Alfonzo opened the refrigerator, pulled out a sealed container with an orange liquid inside, and poured each of them a drink. Then, he brought the three glasses over to the kitchen table on a platter.

Setting the glasses in front of Winry, Edward, and Alphonse, Alfonzo patted Alphonse on the shoulder, just like he did back at the guild hall.

"I gave you the ability to feel, too, Al." Alfonzo said with a wry smile. "I actually should have done that last time, but I forgot. Feeling the texture of food is part of the enjoyment, as well. But since you can't chew, I didn't think it was necessary."

"By the way, where did all that food you dumped into your armor go, Al?" Winry asked.

"Actually, I don't know." Alphonse replied in a confused tone.

"Oh, Ed asked that question earlier, I guess I never got around to answering." Alfonzo said. "I added sigils that would vaporize the food on contact with the inside of the armor... And those vapors were what allowed Al to taste the food."

"You know what, I don't even wanna know anymore." Edward said while shaking his head. "All of this is so unscientific that it's making my head hurt."

"Then, I guess I won't go into detail about how I got those sigils to interact with Al's soul." Alfonzo replied with a grin.

"Please don't." Edward groaned.

"Wait, since you can add senses to your Automail, can you do the same for Ed?" Winry asked excitedly.

"Yeah, I cou---" Alfonzo began to reply as he started taking ingredients out of the refrigerator.

"You don't have to worry about that." Edward said, interrupting Alfonzo's reply. "Unless Winry figures out how to do it, I'm fine with my arm the way it is."

Realizing what he just blurted out, Edward blushed fiercely. At the same time, in response to Edward's declaration, Alphonse could only shake his head once again while Winry's face reddened just like Edward's. Meanwhile, another teasing smile made it onto Alfonzo's face.

Before he could start his teasing, however, Elicia entered the kitchen.

"Alright, are you ready for the tour?" Elicia asked excitedly.

"Yup!" Edward exclaimed loudly. "Let's go. Hahaha! I'm really looking forward to seeing such a beautiful home."

With that, Edward stood up and walked out of the kitchen towards the direction where Elicia just entered the kitchen from, leaving Elicia standing there with a confused expression on her face., Winry blushing fiercely, and Alphonse shaking his head at his brother's antics.

Chapter 386: Talking to the Elric Brothers

After Edward's exit, an awkward atmosphere settled in the kitchen. While Elicia, Winry, and Alphonse were not sure what to do about it, Alfonzo could no longer hold back his laughter.

"Damn... Hahahaha... That was hilarious!" Alfonzo bellowed in jubilation. "And the best part about it was that I didn't do anything."

Naturally, Alfonzo's laughter and exclamation made Winry blush even harder, if that was at all possible, while Alphonse continued to shake his head before standing up and following his brother out of the kitchen. Meanwhile, Elicia could only tilt her head in confusion. Though, she felt like she missed something fun.

"Anyway..." Elicia said awkwardly. "Let's get to the tour, okay, Winry?"

"Uh... Yeah... Sure..." Winry said awkwardly as she stood up.

"Alright, we'll be back later, Fonzie." Elicia said as she linked arms with Winry and started pulling her out of the kitchen. "By the way, what are you making for lunch?"

"I'm making lasagna." Alfonzo replied as he got back to preparing the ingredients. "I'm gonna make a big ass pan just like Mama used to make."

Hearing that, Elicia's eyes lit up. Knowing that Alfonzo was talking about the lasagna his mother from his past life used to make, she could not help but be excited.

As previously mentioned, the reason Alfonzo learned how to cook was because his mother in his past life was a terrible cook. However, she made some of the best meat sauce Alfonzo had ever tasted in either life. And lasagna was his favorite of all the things she used to make with it.

In fact, Alfonzo's mother's lasagna was so popular that his friends, before they abandoned him, would get upset if they ever missed out on her making it.

Around the same time, the other girls came down to the first floor to help with the tour, leaving Alfonzo alone to make the magic happen in the kitchen. Then, after about forty minutes, the group returned to the kitchen.

"This place is awesome." Edward said with appreciation clear in his tone. "Though, I don't think I'd like that sport you call basketball."

"Well, I can understand why." Cana said in a mischievous tone. "It's kind of made for people who aren't so... vertically challenged, after all."

"Don't call me short!" Ed shot back fiercely.

"Come on, Cana." Mirajane said with a pleasant smile on her face. Though, she also had mischief swirling in her eyes. "Even if it's true, you should stop teasing him, he's a guest."

"I swear, I'm never coming back here ever again." Edward hissed out.

That lead to the rest of the group laughing uproariously.

"Come on, Brother." Alphonse said, the smile evident in his tone. "You know they don't mean any harm."

"So what?" Edward replied. "I don't like walking around with this group of giants."

That comment only caused the group laughing even harder.

Eventually, they made their way back up the stairs from the basement. And when they did, they were hit with the scent from the kitchen, causing everyone to salivate, other than Alphonse, for obvious reasons. Then, as a group, they rushed towards the kitchen.

"Fonzie, is the food ready?" Cana asked, the first to make it to the kitchen.

"Not quite." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "It'll be ready to come out of the oven in about ten minutes. Then, we'll have to let it cool for another ten."

"Do we really have to let it cool?" Marin asked as she approached Alfonzo, who was sitting at the kitchen table. Then, after sitting in his lap, she continued. "We're all wizards. There's no way it would be too hot for us to eat, right?"

"Trust me, Marin, you should let it cool like Fonzie said." Elicia said. "That little bit of extra time makes all the difference."

While she spoke, all the gazes in the room were drawn to Elicia. And when they saw the dazed look in her eyes, they decided to believe her. So, they all took seats around the table and chatted while waiting for the lasagna to be ready. Though, with the scent filling the kitchen, they were not able to fully concentrate on the conversation.

About twenty minutes later, the lasagna was ready to serve. However, instead of serving it immediately, Alfonzo separated quite a large portion from the pan. And there were two reasons for that. First, he had to make sure to leave some for Ultear, Erza, and Lucy. And second, he put some away for later. Because

he knew the effect of his mother's lasagna recipe on people. And that was to overeat without minding the signals their body was sending them.

After that, Alfonzo served the food, not only did everyone get a slice of the lasagna, but they were also served a salad and slice of garlic bread. And needless to say, everyone loved it.

After their late lunch, the group broke up by gender with the ladies filing into Elicia's workstation, where they would chat while Elicia made some clothes for Winry. Meanwhile, the guys made their way to the living room to talk about what Edward and Alphonse wanted to know.

"So, what do you want to know?" Alfonzo asked as he and the Elrics took their seats on the couches in the living room.

"First of all, were you serious about firing one of the homunculus into orbit?" Edward asked skeptically.

"Yeah, it happened on the day those two douche bags from the Magic Council were supposed to be executed. "Even though I'm sure both of them are dead, one of them was turned into a homunculus by Bradley... Who turned out to be a homunculus, as well."

"You mean King Bradley?" Alphonse asked in a shocked tone. "Fiore's Knight Commander?"

"Yup." Alfonzo replied with a nod. "He's the one I shot into orbit, by the way."

"But how is that possible?" Edward asked. "There are a lot of people who have seen him age over the years."

"No idea." Alfonzo replied. Though, he was fully aware of what happened to create a homunculus like Wrath. "But when he took off that patch of his, his iris and pupil were replaced with an ouroboro's."

"Damn it!" Edward exclaimed while smashing his right fist down on his thigh. "Now it makes sense why he was so hellbent on taking in Greed."

"Oh, and speaking of Greed, they turned that traitor, Org, into a homunculus they called Greed after introducing a Philosopher's Stone into his blood stream. Though I'm pretty sure he's someone totally different from Org by now."

"They can make homunculi like that, too?" Alphonse asked in a tone filled with disbelief.

"Both Lici and I saw it happen." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "But I'm sure you heard about it, the execution was interrupted by a demon. So, we really could not stop him."

"Yeah, we heard about that." Edward replied through gritted teeth. "If only we had come straight back to Crocus after the whole thing with Greed happened. We might have been able to do something."

"There's no point thinking about that now, Brother." Alphonse said. Then, he turned his attention back to Alfonzo. "And how did you kill the other one?"

"Oh, it wasn't me that killed that one." Alfonzo replied while shaking his head. "But based on the description, both Lici and I had fought her before."

"Her, was it the one that could elongate her fingernails and cut through almost anything?" Edward asked.

"Yeah, that's right." Alfonzo replied. "I guess the homunculus figured out that it was me and Lici who saved Hughes, who found out a pretty big secret. So, they tried to take Marin hostage to lure us out. But they underestimated her too much. And she ended up killing her in the end."

"But how?" Edward asked.

"With one of these." Alfonzo said as he pulled this tonfa off his back. "These weapons are a bit special. And when they come in contact with a Philosopher's Stone, they release the souls trapped within. Unfortunately, they don't help those souls to pass on. Instead, they end up as wandering souls."

"Seriously?" Edward asked skeptically. "They don't look like anything other than a pair of painted tonfa to me."

"Well, I have a Philosopher's Stone on hand that I could show you with." Alfonzo said with a shrug. "But I'm still studying it to see if there's a way to cancel out the homunculi's abilities."

"Seriously?" Edward exclaimed in surprise. "You have one of those, too?"

"Yeah, they used it in a trap they set for Lici." Alfonzo replied. "Honestly, I don't know why they would do that. Then, again, the fake quest they put up asked her to find an heirloom in a ruined village. And a Philosopher's Stone looks as precious as they get."

"I guess..." Edward muttered as he slumped back into the couch. "*Sigh* We've been dealing with them for years. And you guys have had almost as many run ins with homunculi as we have."

"You were even able to kill two of them, too." Alphonse added in a somewhat forlorn tone.

"Well, we have to get rid of them." Alfonzo replied. "I mean, if you knew what they were planning, you'd wanna get rid of them, too."

"And just what are they planning?" Edward said, sounding unsure if he actually wanted to know.

"Well, they've been digging a big ass [Transmutation Circle] underground that covers most of Fiore." Alfonzo replied. "On top of that, they've massacred towns and villages in certain spots, which makes it look like the [Transmutation Circle] used to make a Philosopher's Stone. Or that's what Hughes told me, at least. That's probably why they tried to get rid of him, too."

Hearing that, both Edward and Alphonse sat up straight. And while Edward's eyes were wide open in shock, Alfonzo had no doubt that Alphonse would have the same expression on his face if he had one.

"If that's true, why haven't you told anyone about it?" Edward asked angrily.

"Because if we did, it would cause panic." Alfonzo replied casually. "And that would just make it easier for the homunculi, and any other assholes who wanna cause trouble, to make a mess of things."

Hearing Alfonzo's response, Edward and Alphonse exchanged glances. Then, they both nodded in understanding. Although they were unsure of who exactly Alfonzo was talking about, they knew there were a lot of people in the world who would love to take advantage of the chaos news like that would bring to Fiore.

"Anyway, do you have any more questions?" Alfonzo asked in a relaxed tone.

"No, not for now, at least." Edward replied.

"Same here." Alphonse chipped in.

"Good." Alfonzo said with a nod. Then, his expression became more serious. "And like Sun said back at the guild hall, if you want to know my opinion on how the two of you could get your bodies back, I'd be happy to tell you. But I'd need to know the whole story. Even so, I know that's not an easy story to tell. So, just know that the offer is always open."

Once again, Edward and Alphonse exchanged glances. This time, however, their expressions were much more solemn. Then, they looked Alfonzo in his eyes before responding.

"After everything you've told us, as hard as it is to believe, we believe you when you say you have some thoughts about how we can get our bodies back." Edward said.

"But we're still not sure about telling you what happened back then." Alphonse said, picking up where his brother left off. "It's really personal, after all."

"Yeah, I feel you." Alfonzo replied with a nod. "Even so, the offer will always be open to you. Oh, and on another note. If you were thinking about going after the homunculus, you should probably give up on that."

Caught off guard by the change in subject, Edward and Alphonse looked at Alfonzo blankly. However, before too long, Edward was able to snap out of his daze.

"What do you mean?" Edward asked with a frown. "There's a chance they may know how to get our bodies back."

"I can see where you're coming from." Alfonzo said.

A moment later, just before he continued, his expression changed. Instead of the relaxed expression he wore for the majority of the conversation thus far, he was now sporting a blood thirsty smile.

"The homunculus were the ones who gave the Zeref Cult responsible for building the Tower of Heaven, the location of me and Lici's home village." Alfonzo said, his voice sounding more like a growl than before. "And because of that, both of our parents were killed while protecting us."

Hearing that, Edward opened his eyes wide in surprise. And Alfonzo how no doubt that Alphonse's expression would be similar if he could have one.

"But why would they do that?" Alphonse asked in an unsure tone. "If they were only looking to make the [Transmutation Circle] why would they even need to?"

"Because my mother was the Mage Killer, Bianca Rollen before she retired and got married." Alfonzo replied, his magic power starting to leak. "And..."

"Her magic, [Dispel Magic], would have been a hurdle for the homunculi's plans, right?" Edward asked, finishing Alfonzo's sentence.

"That's right." Alfonzo replied, "And let me give you a friendly piece of advice."

Upon reaching that point, Alfonzo paused as he tried to get his emotions in check and reel in his magic power, as he could see that Edward was paling under the pressure.

"I wouldn't try to get involved if I were you." Alfonzo continued once he was in control of his emotions again. "Because when we get started, there's a good chance we'll go way overboard. And the collateral damage will be like the Fairy Tail of old."

Naturally, Alfonzo's statement about losing control and causing large amounts of collateral damage was a lie. Because no matter how they thought about it, destroying the city of Crocus would be enough to get Fairy Tail disbanded and end up on the continent's most wanted list.

But considering the way that Edward and Alphonse nodded their heads, Alfonzo was sure that his little scare tactic was enough to keep them from trying to get involved.

Chapter 387: Just Hanging Out

While Alfonzo was conversing with the Elrics in the living room, Winry was standing in the middle of Elicia's workstation in nothing but her bra and panties. And the reason for that was simple, Elicia was currently moving around her, taking her measurements for the clothes she would design and create for her.

"You know, I don't think this is necessary." Winry said awkwardly while the rest of the girls stood around and watched Elicia work.

"There's no point in trying to stop her, you know." Cana said before taking a swig from her flask.

"Cana's right." Mirajane said with a smile. "Once Lici gets the idea to make clothes, there's no stopping her."

"Why would you even want to?" Marin asked in a tone filled with confusion. "I mean, Lici makes the best clothes in the world."

Hearing that, Elicia smiled brightly as she took down Winry's measurements.

"Yeah, but there's no need to make something just for me." Winry said. "I mean, I would be fine with just having a few pieces that you can find in the stores."

"Nope." Elicia said as she wrapped the measuring tape around Winry's shoulders. "You're way too pretty to not have something special made for you."

In response, the only thing Winry could do was sigh while smiling wryly.

"I don't know why you're complaining, girl." Cana said with a roguish grin. "Once Lici is done with you, that little boyfriend of yours won't be able to take his eyes off you."

Immediately, Winry's wry smile turned into an embarrassed expression with a deep blush.

"Wh-wh-what are you talking about?" Winry squeaked out. "Ed's not my boyfriend! We're just childhood friends!"

"Huh?" Cana exclaimed in feigned confusion. "But I never mentioned anything about Ed. Oh ho! Looks like there's more to your relationship than just being childhood friends, huh?"

Somehow, Winry managed to blush even harder as she lowered her head to hide her embarrassment.

"Stand up straight!" Elicia barked as Winry started shrinking into herself.

"Yes, Ma'am!" Winry replied subconsciously as she stood up straight once again.

"Lici can be really intense when she's working, huh?" Sun said with a shocked expression on her face.

Not only Sun, but everyone was surprised at Elicia's tone. Since none of them ever moved while Elicia was taking their measurements, they never got to see this side of her.

"Sorry." Elicia replied with a wry smile. "I just don't want there to be any mistakes."

With that, the girls stopped teasing Winry... for now. Meanwhile, Elicia focused on taking down all of Winry's measurements. A little while later, Elicia put down her measuring tape before sitting down at her workstation.

"Alright, the measurements are done." Elicia said happily. "Why don't you girls take Winry to have a bath in the hot tub."

"Hot tub?" Winry asked in a confused tone.

"Oh, that's a great idea." Mirajane said, not one to say no to a nice dip in the hot tub. "Trust me, you'll love it. It'll be like no bath you've ever taken before."

"Uh... Okay?" Winry said, still confused by the term. "But aren't all baths hot? Why do you need to call it a hot tub?"

Hearing that, Elicia, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and sun could not help but laugh.

"Just trust us, okay?" Cana said as she started pushing Winry towards the master bedroom. "Once you've taken a bath in here, you'll never be able to compare the two."

"Okay, okay, I can walk by myself." Winry said as she was pushed along.

"This is gonna be fun." Sun said happily as she followed along.

"Yeah, there's never a bad time for a dip in the hot tub." Mirajane added.

Meanwhile, although Marin did not add to the conversation, she skipped alongside the girls with a smile on her face.

"Oh, and since none of you brought a change of clothes, there should be enough robes for everyone in my closet." Elicia called from behind while quickly sketching the design she had in mind for Winry.

"Which one?" Marin asked from the master bedroom.

"Actually, now that you mention it..." Elicia said, stopping to think for a moment. "I think they're in Fonzie's closet."

"Looks like Alfonzo was right." Mirajane said with a smile. "He always said half of his closet would be filled with your stuff by the time it was all said and done."

"Whatever, Mira~~~!" Elicia replied playfully.

A little more than an hour later, the girls, now wearing bathrobes in assorted colors, walked through the master bedroom, looking rather refreshed. Meanwhile, Elicia was checking her nearly completed work.

"Ah~~~! There's nothing better than taking a dip in the hot tub while having a drink." Cana said with a relaxed smile on her face.

"Well, when you consider that you drink everywhere, I think that lowers the impact, Cana." Marin said playfully.

"What did you say?" Cana asked with a mock expression of anger. "Why don't you say that again?"

With that, Cana lunged at Marin, who hid behind Mirajane to escape. Then, the two ran circles around Mirajane playfully.

"Well, I don't know about having a drink in the hot tub, but that was amazing." Winry said, sounding just as relaxed as Cana. "I bet Granny would love one of these. I wonder if I could buy one from Alfonzo. But how much do they cost?"

"I don't think you have to worry about that, Winry." Mirajane said with a smile as she reached out and caught Cana and Marin by their collars. "Even if Alfonzo doesn't have the time to make one for you, the Sixth Sense shops sell them, too."

"Really?" Winry asked in an amazed tone.

"I think we should quiet down, everyone." Sun said as she pointed into Elicia's workshop through the master bedroom's door.

Hearing Sun's warning, everyone looked in the direction her finger was pointed. After seeing Elicia's concentrated state, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun exchanged glances. Meanwhile, Winry was in awe at how quickly Elicia had finished working.

'Then again, that may be a different outfit.' Winry thought while she watched Elicia make any necessary adjustments. 'I mean, it's only been a little more than an hour since we left her, right?'

While Winry was lost in her thoughts, the other girls finished their silent conversation. Then, Sun stepped closer to Winry and whispered into her ear.

"Hey, Winry, we're gonna go upstairs and get dressed, okay?" Sun said quietly, trying not to disturb Elicia. "You should wait here. Oh, and we'll take your clothes and put them in the washing machine, too."

Although Winry was a little uncomfortable to be left alone in just a bathrobe, she ultimately nodded her head in agreement. She was not really keen on putting on clothes she had already worn after a bath, after all.

A moment later, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun filed out of the workstation as quietly as possible before heading upstairs to get dressed. Meanwhile, Winry had nothing to do but watch Elicia work. Though, she would admit that she found it quite fascinating.

"And that should do it." Elicia said as she cut off the final thread. "Now, the only thing to do is wait for Winry and the others to get out of the bath."

'Wow, she didn't even notice us earlier.' Winry thought to herself after hearing Elicia speak to herself. 'That's some real concentration.'

A moment later, Elicia stretched and took the chance to look around. And when she did, she made eye contact with Winry.

"Oh, I guess you're already done." Elicia said with a smile. Then, she noticed that Winry was standing alone in a bathrobe. "I guess the others went to get dressed, huh?"

"Uh... Yeah." Winry replied.

"Well, they'll be back soon." Elicia replied with a shrug. "Anyway, let's get you to try on these clothes."

With that, Elicia picked up a pair of white boy shorts with lace accents and a matching bra from her desk. Then, using her [Thread Magic], she floated the outfit she just finished from the mannequin. After that, she started walking towards the master bedroom.

"Huh?" Winry exclaimed in surprise. "You finished the whole outfit that fast? You even made me new underwear?"

"Of course." Elicia said happily. "Unless you wanted to put on your old ones."

"No, that's not what I... You know what, never mind." Winry said, trying to explain herself before eventually deciding to give up.

Like that, Winry followed Elicia into the master bedroom to try on the new clothes Elicia just finished making. Not long later, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun returned to the master bedroom as well. Then, like always, they were all amazed at the quick, yet quality work Elicia had done.

"Now, I guess it's time to show off for Ed, right?" Cana said in a mischievous tone.

"Yeah, I bet you'll knock him dead." Marin added with a smile.

"You really think so?" Winry asked curiously. "I mean, it these clothes aren't much different than what I usually wear."

"Don't underestimate Lici's ability to bring out a woman's appeal." Mirajane replied with her usual smile. "She has a way of emphasizing your good points in a subtle way."

"If you say so." Winry said as she looked at herself in the full length mirror in the master bedroom one more time.

In the mirror's reflection, Winry saw herself, surrounded by the other girls, wearing a somewhat tight, black crop top, an unzipped, short-sleeved white summer jacket, a matching white, mid-thigh-length, pleated skirt, white ankle socks, and a pair of white tennis shoes with black accents.

On top of that, the relatively tight crop top drew a little more attention to Winry's breasts, which usually do not stand out because of her tomboyish fashion choices, despite the fact that they are relatively big.

"There's no point thinking about it for too long." Sun said as she started gently pushing Winry towards the door. "Let's go see what Ed thinks, instead."

Finding Sun's enthusiasm infectious, Winry could not help but giggle as she let herself be pushed along. Meanwhile, the rest of the girls smiled as they followed behind.

Eventually, the ladies reached the living room. To everyone's surprise, however, Alfonzo, Edward, and Alphonse were no longer there.

"Where did they go?" Sun asked while tilting her head cutely.

"Hold on, I'll check." Elicia said as she spread her [Magic Power Detection]. "They didn't leave the house, otherwise, we would have felt it in the barrier. Oh, I found them. They're downstairs."

"Then, let's go." Cana said excitedly. "I could use another drink, anyway."

"Uh... Cana, you're still holding a drink right now." Sun pointed out.

"Yeah?" Cana asked, not understanding what Sun was getting at.

"Don't bother, Sun." Mirajane said as she patted Sun on the shoulder. "A small detail like that would never slow Cana down."

As the ladies continued to chat, they made their way out of the living room and headed down the stairs to the basement. Then, when they finally arrived in the game room, they found Alfonzo standing next to the pool table with a pool cue in his hands, Edward bending over the pool table while lining up a shot, and Alphonse standing off to the side watching the ongoing game.

"Come on, Ed." Alfonzo said with a smile. "You've been lining up that shot for almost three minutes now. If you're gonna shoot, just shoot."

"Shut up!" Edward barked back. "Let me concentrate, damn it."

Seeing that exchange, the ladies made their way over to Alphonse so that they would not interrupt Edward's concentration.

"What's up, Al?" Winry asked. "Why does Ed look like he's taking this so seriously?"

"Oh, Winry, you're back." Alphonse said as he turned his attention from the game to Winry. "Ed thought he would..."

After seeing Winry's new outfit, Alphonse's words were caught in his throat. Although Winry's clothes were not much different than her usual casual outfits, Alphonse found himself tongue-tied, though he did not know the reason why. However, he did find himself paying more attention to her chest than usual.

"Al, are you okay?" Winry asked, not expecting Alphonse to stop mid-sentence.

"Oh, um... Yes, I'm fine" Alphonse replied, snapping back to his senses. "Anyway, Ed challenged Alfonzo to a game of billiards. Then, he accepted a bet to make it more interesting."

"What kind of bet?" Marin asked curiously.

"The loser would have to wear female clothing produced by Elicia." Alphonse replied.

Hearing the wager, Cana, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun's eyes lit up. Then, they all turned their gazes towards the pool table, hoping that Edward would win. Just the thought of Alfonzo's tall, athletic frame wearing a dress, or a skirt, was tickling their funny bones.

Meanwhile, Elicia was excited at the prospect of doing something new. She had never designed female clothing for a man, after all. Winry, on the other hand, was hoping that Edward would lose for the same reason that Cana and the other girls wanted him to win.

"*Sigh* I'm just glad I don't have a body." Alphonse said in an exasperated tone. "I think that's the first time I've ever said that..."

With that, Alphonse stopped to ponder. However, he was broken out of his contemplation rather quickly.

"Why do you say that?" Mirajane asked, though she had an idea as to why.

"Oh, because I probably would have been pulled into that bet, too, if I had one." Alphonse replied.

"You know, you could still be put into a female suit of armor." Marin said with a grin. "I mean, I'm sure Alfonzo could manipulate the metal of your armor to make it quite feminine."

Hearing that, Alphonse began to shudder violently. On top of that, all the ladies felt as if they saw an illusion of a sweat drop sliding down Alphonse's helmet.

Clack! *Clack!* *Clack!*

Just then, the sound of billiard balls colliding drew everyone's attention back to the pool table.

"Damn it!" Edward's angry shout echoed throughout the game room.

"Aww... You put the 8-ball in early, too bad." Alfonzo said with a shit-eating grin on his face. Then, he lifted his right hand and pinched his thumb and index finger close together without letting them touch. "You missed it by that~~~ much."

"Shut up! I want a rematch!" Edward shouted disgruntledly. "Double or nothing!"

"Come on, Ed." Winry said while suppressing a smile. "Don't be a sore loser."

"Shut up, Winry!" Ed shouted as he spun around towards the sound of Winry's voice. "What would... you... know...?"

However, after catching sight of Winry's new outfit, his words lost their aggressiveness as he trailed off. In the end, he could only stare at Winry while his face reddened rapidly.

"See, I told you this would happen." Cana said while bumping Winry with her hip.

Meanwhile, Winry, after seeing Edward's reaction, started feeling self-conscious because of his stare.

"So... How do I look?" Winry asked nervously while pinching the sides of her skirt.

"Oh, um... You look great." Edward replied as he swiftly turned towards the game room's entrance.
"Anyway, I think we've been here long enough. I think we should go talk to Mr. Hughes about what we found out. You can stay here if you want though, Winry. Let's go, Al."

As he spoke, Edward, with his face completely red, started walking towards the game room's entrance. Before he could step through the door, however, he felt a hand land on his shoulder.

"You're not trying to go back on our bet, are you?" Alfonzo asked, that shit-eating grin still on his face.

A moment later, another, more slender hand, landed on Edward's other shoulder.

"Yes, I'm really looking forward to designing an outfit for you, Ed." Elicia said while smiling from ear to ear.

"Oh, of course not." Edward said with cold sweat dripping down his face and back. "I just thought we needed to talk to Mr. Hughes, is all."

"Oh, you don't need to worry about that, Ed." Alfonzo replied. "I'll go to the guild and get him while you get your measurements taken. Then, you two can talk to him while Lici makes your outfit."

Hearing that Maes would be here to see him cross-dressing, Edward's expression fell as his face paled rapidly.

"You know what, I think I can wait to talk to him until later." Edward said, basically pleading for Alfonzo to not bring Maes over.

"If you say so." Alfonzo replied with a shrug.

"Then, you can come upstairs with me." Elicia said, the excitement visible in her eyes. "I'll have your measurements taken real quick. Then, you can come back down here and have fun until I'm done."

Nodding mechanically, Edward allowed himself to be dragged upstairs with lifeless eyes. At the same time, Alfonzo turned his attention towards Alphonse.

"So, you wanna give it a shot, too, Al?" Alfonzo asked with a bright smile.

"No... No thank you." Alphonse replied immediately. "Maybe another day."

In response, Alfonzo simply shrugged his shoulders, causing Alphonse to sigh in relief. Meanwhile, Winry rushed out of the game room excitedly to discuss the design for Edward's outfit with Elicia.

"Tch!" Cana clicked her tongue. "I was hoping Fonzie would lose. I really wanted to see him in a dress, or something."

Immediately after hearing Cana's muttering, Mirajane, Marin, and Sun quickly distanced themselves from her.

"Oh, did you?" Alfonzo asked as he approached Cana. "Then, how about a little wager over a game. If I lose, I'll wear female clothes that Lici designs. But if you lose, you can't touch any alcohol for the next month."

Hearing Alfonzo, Cana's head snapped in his direction. At first, she recoiled at the thought of not being able to drink for a month if she lost. However, after remembering how good she was at darts, she boldly accepted his wager.

About an hour later, Cana's heart wrenching cries rang out through the mansion, shortly followed by accusations of cheating with the use of magic. Naturally, no one took her side. Especially since everyone was capable of feeling the fluctuations of magic power usage, even without the use of [Magic Power Detection], which the rest of the ladies had been using from the start to not miss either competitor cheating.

Chapter 388: Goodbyes and Battle Preparations

A week has passed since Alfonzo had his conversation with Edward and Alphonse. And in that time, not much of note has taken place. Gray, Ultear, Erza, Natsu, Happy, and Lucy did finish their quests and return during that week, though. And they, like the rest of Fairy Tail, had the opportunity to interact with the visitors, who they all came to like, in some capacity. Even Meredy, despite competing with Winry for Edward's attention, genuinely liked Winry, too.

One thing worthy of mention, however, was the fact that Alfonzo, Elicia, Erza, and Marin took an S-Class quest together and left Magnolia a day ago.

Other than that, today was the day that Winry, Edward, and Alphonse would be leaving Magnolia. So, they were currently at the train station waiting for their train to arrive. Standing on the platform with them were Cana, Ultear, Mirajane, Sun, Lucy, Maes, Gracia, and the little Elicia. Naturally, they were there to send them off.

"I'm gonna miss you, Big Sis." The little Elicia said tearfully while hugging Winry.

"I'll miss you too, Elicia." Winry said with a smile. "You'll have to show me your magic next time we see each other, okay?"

Hearing Winry mention her magic, the little Elicia's eyes brightened.

"I will." Little Elicia said with a nod. "I'll show you all my magic beast friends when you come back."

"I'm looking forward to it." Winry replied happily.

Hearing the two, the rest of the people on the platform smiled warmly.

"Come now, Elicia." Gracia said in a soothing tone. "You have to let Winry say goodbye to the others, too."

"*Sniff* Okay." The little Elicia said before reluctantly releasing Winry.

A moment later, Gracia pulled her daughter into her arms before addressing Winry.

"It was good to see you again, Winry." Gracia said with a smile. Then, she turned her attention to Edward and Alphonse. "And the same goes for you, too, boys."

"It was nice to see you, too, Miss Gracia." Alphonse said politely.

"Yeah, we'll make sure to come visit you again when we get the chance." Edward added.

"You can come by any time." Gracia replied. "The three of you are always welcome."

"That's right, you three." Maes added as he stepped forward to pat the Elrics on their shoulders. "Don't be strangers, alright."

"Of course." Winry replied with a smile.

After the Hughes family had the opportunity to say their goodbyes, they stepped back, allowing the young ladies of Fairy Tail to have their chance.

"Hey, Ed, you better not lose those clothes Elicia made for you." Cana said with a mischievous smile. "Otherwise, you won't like the consequences."

"Leave me alone." Edward replied in a huff.

"Although it sounds like Cana is just teasing you, Ed..." Sun said while smiling wryly. "... Lici can get pretty... intense when it comes to someone damaging the clothes she makes. If you don't believe me, ask Tear's mother about what happened after the S-Class exam."

Remembering Elicia's glare that made Ur stutter and lower her head in apology, after Elicia found out how Gray and Meredy destroyed the clothes she made specifically for Ur, was enough to make the ladies from Fairy Tail shiver in fear.

After seeing the expressions on Cana's, Ultear's, Mirajane's, Sun's, and Lucy's faces, Edward started to rethink his idea to throw the elegant, sleeveless, backless, evening gown Elicia made for him into the fireplace once he got back to Crocus.

"Well, it was nice meeting you all, Cana, Ultear, Mirajane, and Lucy." Winry said with a smile after remembering Edward in his dress. "And it was great to see you again, too, Sun. I'll definitely come to visit again."

"Yeah." Sun said happily as she approached Winry and pulled her into a hug. "And I'll make sure to come see you and Granny next time I'm near Resenbool, too."

Agreeing with Sun's sentiments, the other ladies said their farewells while exchanging hugs with Winry, as well.

"It's too bad Alfonzo, Lici, Erza, and Marin had to take that quest, though." Winry said, sounding a little disappointed. "I would have liked to see them one more time before we had to leave."

"I know what you mean." Mirajane said with a smile. "But they're wizards. Things like this can't be helped sometimes."

"Well, I'm glad that guy isn't here." Edward said with a huff.

"You're just mad he won your bet, Brother." Alphonse interjected. "Other than that, you didn't really have a problem with him. "

In response, Edward only looked away with a pout. However, he did not say anything to refute his brother's words.

{"The train bound for Crocus will arrive on platform six in two minutes."} A female voice said over the station's P.A. system. {Please make sure you have all your belongings and wait behind the yellow line until the train's doors have opened. I repeat..."}

Exactly two minutes after the announcement, the train headed to Crocus pulled up to the platform. Then, after another minute, or so, the doors opened, and passengers began to disembark.

"I guess that means it's time." Edward said as he picked up his luggage.

"Yeah, it was really nice meeting you all." Alphonse added.

"I'll definitely come and see you all again!" Winry said excitedly.

"You better." Cana said with a smile.

"Hey, Ed." Maes said just before the three boarded the train.

"Yeah?" Edward asked as he turned to face Maes.

"Tell Roy to come and visit me some time, okay?" Maes asked with a smile.

"Sure." Edward replied with a shrug. "But you know how he is. Getting him to take a vacation won't be easy."

"Just tell him while Lt. Hawkeye is around." Maes replied. "That's all I ask

With that, everyone said their final goodbyes before Winry, Edward, and Alphonse boarded the train. Then, after a few more minutes, the train's whistle sounded before it slowly pulled away from the platform.

Watching the train leave, little Elicia waved vigorously as tears gathered in her eyes. Then, when the train was no longer visible, she hugged Gracia tightly.

"Well, we should get going." Maes said as he picked up his daughter. "I'm sure we've all got work to do."

Hearing that, everyone turned towards the train station's entrance.

"It's a shame that Alfonzo, Elicia, Erza, and Marin couldn't be here to send them off, too." Gracia said as she walked alongside her husband.

While Gracia felt truly regretful that Alfonzo, Elicia, Erza, and Marin were unable to see Winry, Edward, and Alphonse off, the others, excluding little Elicia, exchanged glances. As official members of Fairy Tail, they were aware of where Alfonzo and the other girls were.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Kingdom of Fiore, Crocus.

As the train from Magnolia to Crocus was pulling away from the station, Alfonzo, Elicia, Erza, and Marin were gathered in a hotel suite in Crocus.

"Were the two of you able to find anything?" Marin asked while sitting on the couch in the suite's living room. "I really wanna show those homunculi why targeting me was such a bad idea."

"Indeed." Erza replied with a strong nod. "They need to be made aware of the folly of their ways."

"I found an entrance to a cave system that extends under most of the city on the city's outskirts." Alfonzo replied. "And if all the mindless chimera I sensed roaming the caves are any indication, I think it may lead to the place where my Techno Organic Metal was extracted from the one that can transform into other people."

"What about you, Lici?" Marin asked.

"Yeah, since Bradley was one of them, I searched his house." Elicia replied. "And I did find an elevator shaft that led deep underground in the house."

"I would venture a guess that the elevator leads directly to their hideout." Erza said sternly. Perhaps that would be our best option."

"I doubt it." Elicia replied while shaking her head. "Bradley's wife and son are still living in the house. Which would make it much harder to start the elevator and remain undetected."

"Indeed, that could be an issue." Erza replied with a nod.

"On top of that, Bradley's son, Selim, doesn't have a magic power signature, either." Elicia continued.

"Are you telling me he turned his own child in to a homunculus? Like he did with Org?" Marin asked with her eyebrows furrowed.

"I don't think that's it, Marin." Alfonzo replied as he started combing his fingers through Marin's hair to calm her down. "According to the information I was able to get from Ed and Al over the last couple of days, homunculi can't reproduce biologically. So, there's definitely something else going on."

"Actually, from the information I was able to pick up, Selim was adopted." Elicia said with a shrug.
"Apparently, he's a relative of King Bradley's who lost his parents in some kind of accident. And with no one else to take care of him, the Bradley's adopted him."

"Actually, I find that weird." Marin said, tilting her head into Alfonzo's hand as she spoke. "Why would a homunculus have a family?"

"Probably to appear more human." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "I mean, they're posing as humans, after all."

"I guess..." Marin said, though she still found it strange.

"Anyway, we should probably move tonight." Alfonzo said. "I'm sure they already know we're in the city."

"I agree." Erza said. "I'd rather not have innocent people caught up in our inevitable battle."

"I'm actually surprised they haven't attacked us already." Marin said with a content smile on her face as she laid her head on Alfonzo's lap while enjoying the feeling of his fingertips brushing against her scalp.
"I mean, it's not like we snuck into the city, right?"

"Oh, that's because I put all of us and the Escalade under the effects of [Hiding in Plain Sight], shortly after I noticed we were being watched." Elicia said cheerfully as she started patting Marin's head from the other side of Alfonzo. "So, I'm sure they've been trying to find us the whole time."

"Then, why are you so sure they'll attack us soon?" Marin asked curiously.

"Because I saw people running around and checking hotel registries while I was heading to Bradley's house earlier." Elicia said.

"That means they will find us eventually." Erza continued. "And I would be willing to wager that it will be soon."

"Probably." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "Actually, we probably shouldn't wait until tonight to start moving."

"Why?" Marin asked as she made herself more comfortable.

"Because it would be easier to catch them off guard." Alfonzo replied. "They definitely don't think we know where their hideout is. Otherwise, they would have definitely tried harder to get rid of us. So, if we just stroll in, they won't have as much time to prepare."

"I guess that makes sense." Marin replied. "Then, when are we gonna leave?"

"Now." Alfonzo and Elicia said with the flames of revenge burning in their eyes.

"Seriously?" Marin asked as she looked up at Alfonzo and Elicia. "But I just got---"

Before Marin could finish, she made eye contact with Alfonzo and Elicia. And when she saw the emotions in their eyes, she shut her mouth. Then, she sat up with a determined expression on her face.

"Yeah, let's go." Marin said. "We'll make them pay for what they did to your parents and Erza's village."

Not only Alfonzo and Elicia were burning with the desire for revenge. But after seeing the projected [Transmutation Circle] on a map that Hughes marked, Erza found out that her village, Rosemary Village, was one of the massacred villages that were part of the large [Transmutation Circle] needed to create the Philosopher's Stone.

"We can't just charge in, though." Alfonzo said as he calmed himself forcefully. "We need to come up with a strategy."

Hearing that, Elicia, Erza, and Marin all nodded in agreement. Then, the quartet began discussing the best way to infiltrate the enemy hideout.

Meanwhile, under the city, in the cavern with the dragon skeleton, Father, Envy, Gluttony, and Greed were gathered, discussing the arrival of Alfonzo and the others.

"Have you still not been able to find them?" Father asked, sounding a bit impatient.

"I'm sorry, Father." Envy replied. "Although one of our informants saw them enter the city in their magic vehicle, they lost them shortly afterwards."

"It must be that one chick's magic." Greed said with a shrug. "When Wrath and I fought her after the execution, she just suddenly appeared at one point. It's probably some kind of [Stealth Magic]."

"We've already gathered as much." Father replied. "It's potent enough that it can even fool Gluttony's nose."

"You want me to go look around for them, Pops?" Greed asked. "I'm sure I can do a better job than a human."

"That may be a good idea." Father replied while stroking his beard. "I'll allow it."

'Hell yeah!' Greed exclaimed internally. 'I finally get the chance to get out of this shit hole. And I'm never coming back. I just gotta make sure to get outside the [Transmutation Circle] as fast as possible, so that Pride can't find me. But I bet he'll be too distracted to care about me soon. So, I'll be able to get out Scott free.'

Chapter 389: Lost Pride

About an hour after Alfonzo, Elicia, Erza, and Marin decided that they would attack the homunculi, Alfonzo, Erza, and Marin were approaching the cave Alfonzo discovered near the outskirts of the city.

"Are you sure it was a good idea to let Lici go alone?" Marin asked, concern evident in her tone.

"I have faith in her." Erza said in a tone filled with conviction.

"I don't think you need to worry all that much, either." Alfonzo added. "With her skill in stealth and her [Camouflage Magic] on top of that, no one will find her unless she wants to be found."

"I guess you're right... But still..." Marin replied with an unsure expression on her face.

The reason Marin was so worried was due to the fact that during the time the quartet spent planning their raid on the homunculi's hideout, it was decided that Elicia would infiltrate from the Bradley residence, using the elevator she found during her investigation. Meanwhile, Alfonzo, Erza, and Marin would storm the place from the front, drawing the homunculi's attention.

Also, if the opportunity presented itself, Elicia would take out Selim Bradley, who was confirmed to be a homunculus by her [Magic Power Detection] during her initial investigation. Luckily, thanks to her meta knowledge, added with the fact that [Soul Armaments] are a homunculus' weakness, Alfonzo and Elicia were certain that she could get rid of Selim before anything could go wrong.

"The time to discuss this has passed." Erza said as she drew Astraia from the sheath on her hip.

"Erza's right, Marin." Alfonzo said as he drew his Riot and Bedlam, as well. "For now, all we can do is follow the plan. And as long as we're careful and don't do anything stupid, we should be able to handle whatever they throw at us."

"*Sigh* I guess you're right." Marin said as she [Transformed] Nova from a pair of bracelets into a pair of double-edged kodachi. "I just hope she's okay."

Meanwhile, back in the city, Elicia, under the effects of [Hiding in Plain Sight] was waiting for an opportunity to enter the Bradley residence. And while she was doing that, she was watching Selim Bradley work on an assignment from the school he attended.

'For such a lump of pride, he sure plays his role as a human child well.' Elicia thought as she peered through a window. 'Still, until Mrs. Bradley leaves the room, I can't make any moves. Although I know he's not human, I doubt she'd take it well if he just started spouting blood. At least she wouldn't have to see him sparking in red electricity, though. That's only a container, after all.'

As Elicia thought, Selim Bradley, or rather Pride did not have an actual body like the other homunculus. Instead, the mass of moving shadows that reported to Father once before, was his true form. He only inhabited that container to make it easier for him to move around where there were no shadows.

'This is taking too long.' Elicia thought to herself as she watched the family of two sit harmoniously. 'I need to do something about this. But what can I do?'

It took nearly an hour before Elicia found a viable solution to her problem. Eventually, while racking her brain for a way to get Mrs. Bradley out of the room faster, Elicia, while scanning the surroundings with her [Thread Detection], [Magic Power Detection], and her eyes, noticed a currier approaching the Bradley residence from down the street.

'I wonder if this will work.' Elicia thought as she extended a thread towards the currier. 'I just hope it won't hurt him. But if I can do like Doflamingo and control him, I might be able to create a distraction.'

"[Mend the Seams of Reality, Scylla]." Elicia chanted quietly.

A moment later, Elicia's magic power skyrocketed. However, unlike the last time she partially released Scylla's seal, Elicia was not forced out of her stealth. Realizing that something like that could be detrimental, the first thing Elicia did, after discovering that weakness, was to train until it became a non-issue.

Then, once her hands were covered in dragon scales, the tip of the thread extending towards the currier thread itself through the eye of a golden needle with a dragon motif before it was thrust into the base of the currier's neck.

When this happened, the currier immediately stopped in place with lifeless eyes. However, before even a second passed, the light returned to the middle-aged man's eyes as he continued forward. A moment later, he turned onto the walk way leading to the Bradley residence before lifting the door knocker.

'This is a lot harder than I thought it would be.' Elicia muttered to herself while controlling the middle-aged currier's actions.

As it turned out, by inserting one of Scylla's needles into the currier's central nervous system, Elicia was able to take control of the currier's body and control it like a puppet. On top of that, she was able to see what the currier saw, as well.

["You didn't expect it to be easy, did you?"] Scylla asked with an eye roll. ["You're basically splitting your mind in two to do this."]

'I know.' Elicia muttered internally once again. 'It would be a lot easier if I didn't have to worry about controlling my body, too, though.'

["There's no point in complaining."] Scylla said. ["Just pay attention. Once the job is done, you can relax for a bit before moving on to the next step."]

'Yeah, I know.' Elicia replied as she watched Mrs. Bradley stand up from the couch she was sitting on while Pride worked on his assignment.

A moment later, Mrs. Bradley left the room to answer the front door. Meanwhile, Pride, who had been wearing the expression of a diligent student, scowled as soon as Mrs. Bradley was no longer around.

"I'm growing tired of this act." Pride said disdainfully. "Now that Wrath is no longer here, what reason is there for me to continue this charade?"

Shaking his head to rid himself of those thoughts, Pride lowered his head, intending to continue with his assignment. Before he could put his pencil back on the paper, however, his eyes opened wide as he raised his head once again.

"Someone is attacking the caves." Pride said as all the shadows around him began to wave.

Before he could control the shadows to investigate the disturbance he was sensing from underground, however, a large number of threads wound themselves around Pride's mouth, arms, and legs to immobilize him.

Instead of panicking, however, Pride's eyes narrowed as if he were sneering. Then, all the shadows, instead of moving to investigate the disturbance, began moving to cut all the threads binding him.

Before he could cut any of the threads, however, Pride's eyes widened once again as even more threads approached him. These threads, however, were threaded through the eyes of golden needles with dragon motifs.

'These needles, Lust mentioned them in her report when she and Gluttony failed to kill Elicia Taylor.' Pride thought to himself. 'But why is she attacking me? Did she somehow find out that I was a homunculus? No, that's impossible. My act is perfect, even better than Wrath's was.'

Before Pride could think about it for too long, however, all the needles plunged into his body. Before long, they all found their way to his Philosopher's Stone.

At the same time, Pride's eyes widened as a muffled cry of pain tore from his throat. Luckily, Elicia had remembered to gag him as she immobilized his container. Otherwise, Mrs. Bradley would have been alerted.

["Marin and Nova were right."] Scylla said. ["The souls trapped in the Philosopher's Stone are escaping quickly."]

'Good.' Elicia muttered internally. 'I don't know how much longer I can keep this up. Controlling the threads and that other guy is starting to get to me.'

Meanwhile, the middle-aged currier was standing outside the residence's front door, apologizing to Mrs. Bradley for the hold up, and sifting through the bag he carried, looking for a package with her name on it. Naturally, he would never find one, even if there actually was one for her in there.

["It's done."] Scylla said just before Elicia saw Pride's container flop lifelessly onto the table where he had been working. ["Hurry up and get inside. You need to get into the elevator before she comes back. Then, once you're inside, you can rest your mind."]

And just as Scylla said, Elicia dispelled all the threads and needles she used to immobilize and attack Pride. Then, she quietly opened the window she had been peering through, jumped through it, closed it just as quietly, and dashed through the house towards the elevator she found earlier in the day.

A few moments later, Elicia was standing in front of a grandfather clock. Naturally, this clock hid the entrance to the elevator. However, she had no idea how to reveal the elevator's doors.

["You need to hurry."] Scylla said with some urgency. ["Mrs. Bradley is getting impatient."]

'I know, don't rush me.' Elicia replied mentally. 'But the mechanism for this thing isn't magical in nature. So, I have to find it the old-fashioned way.'

["I know that."] Scylla shot back. ["That doesn't change the fact that you're running out of time."]

'I wonder if it's like the entrance to the Bat Cave?' Elicia asked herself as she touched the clock, simultaneously cloaking it in her [Hiding in Plain Sight] spell, as well. She would not want it to make a loud noise if she did something wrong, after all.

A moment later, Elicia opened the front of the clock before pulling on the hanging chimes. Shortly afterward, she heard the sound of gears turning as the clock slid to the side, revealing a single, sliding door and a button just to the side of it.

'There it is.' Elicia muttered internally as she was reaching her limit for parallel processing.

Then, she pressed the button next to the sliding door, which caused the elevator to open. And just as the door slid open, Elicia stumbled into the elevator before turning around to find the buttons that controlled it.

'Thank God he had the buttons marked.' Elicia said as she pressed the button labeled: "Close."

In the next instant, the elevator door slid shut. On top of that, thanks to the [Detection Threads] she had spread out, Elicia could feel the grandfather clock sliding into place as well. Then, Elicia stumbled backwards to lean on the elevator wall before letting herself slide down into a seated position.

"Alright, now I can have that currier leave." Elicia muttered in exhaustion. "Then, I'll give him control of his body back. I wonder if he'll remember this, though."

["Probably not."] Scylla replied. ["He might if he had more magic power, though. But if that were the case, it probably wouldn't have worked in the first place."]

As Scylla spoke, Elicia controlled the currier, making him apologize to Mrs. Bradley for the mistake. Then, after she sent him away and closed the door, she had the currier walk away. Once he was a good distance away from the residence, Elicia extracted her needle from his neck before dispelling both the needle and her thread.

In the next instant, the currier stumbled forward. Luckily, before he could fall to the ground, he snapped back to his senses. Then, after shaking his head a few times, he looked around with a confused expression. However, since he could not feel that anything was wrong, other than seeming to be a little further on his way down the street than he remembered, he simply looked into his currier bag and pulled out a package before, moving on to his next destination.

"Ugh!" Elicia groaned while gripping her head with both hands. "My head hurts so bad."

["Well, at least you learned something new about my abilities."] Scylla replied. ["So, I'd call it an even trade."]

"Yeah, I don't think I would have been able to do that without you." Elicia replied. "I probably could have done it without releasing you, though."

["Maybe if you had managed to fully release my seal, that might be possible."] Scylla said in response.
["But until you can do that, I wouldn't try it without the partial release. Otherwise, there's a good chance you'd cripple, or outright kill, the person you're trying it on."]

"Selim~~~~~! Wake up~~~!" Mrs. Bradley's scream echoed through the house before Elicia could respond to Scylla's assessment.

After that, Elicia heard the sound of Mrs. Bradley panicking as she tried to figure out what was wrong with Selim. Eventually, she could hear the older woman leaving the house in a hurry, undoubtedly taking Selim to get medical attention.

"*Sigh* I really feel bad for her." Elicia said in a tone filled with melancholy. "She was just an unsuspecting victim in all this. But because of our conflict with the homunculi, she's lost both her husband and son in only a couple months."

["I wanna say that's better than losing her life as a sacrifice for a Philosopher's Stone..."] Scylla replied in a similar tone. ["But honestly, I'm not sure I'd want to continue living if we lost Fonzie and our future child."]

"Yeah, me neither." Elicia replied as she leaned her head on the elevator's wall. "All the sudden, I miss Fonzie. I hope he, Erza, and Marin are doing okay."

Chapter 390: Battle Under Crocus; Part 1

Around the time Elicia spotted the mail currier outside the Bradley residence, Alfonzo, Erza, and Marin had just been spotted by the innumerable chimera that roamed the caves leading to the homunculi's hideout.

"There sure are a lot of these things." Marin said, looking slightly disgusted by all the amalgamations of animals and magical beasts.

"Indeed, to treat life like this, even if it is non-intelligent life, shows just what kind of people these homunculi are."

"I guess that means we should put them down quickly." Alfonzo said as he spread his arms to the side, dropping down into his combat stance in the process. "Living as these fucked up abominations must be torture in and of its self, huh?"

With that, the three Fairy Tail wizards exchanged glances. Then, with a nod, they all took the same action simultaneously.

"[Run Wild with Destruction on your Fingertips. Usher in Pandemonium with Creation in Your Hands. Riot, Bedlam]." Alfonzo chanted quietly.

"[Deliver Justice as Swiftly as the Wind, Astraia]." Erza chanted as she lifted her sword over her head.

"[Bend All Creation to My Will, Nova.]" Marin chanted as she held both her kodachi forward.

In the next instant, all three Fairy Tail wizards' magic power skyrocketed as their weapons underwent a change. While Alfonzo's tonfa liquified before covering his hands and forearms, the two pairs of fairy wings that acted as the hand guard of Erza's sword spread. Meanwhile, Marin's multi-colored kodachi began cycling through the colors on their blades.

"Alright, let's get this shit started for real." Alfonzo said just before charging forward into the group of chimera. "[Metal Magic: Circular Cutter]."

With his chant, a pair of circular saw blades grew from his arms, settling themselves on the backs of his hands. Then, those blades immediately began spinning at high speed. A moment later, when Alfonzo reached the first of the chimera, he swung his right arm at the open mouth of a chimera with a large, reptilian head, cutting off its lower jaw in the process.

Growl!

In the next instant, with blood spraying, minced flesh and bone fragments flying everywhere, and a growl of pain, the chimera fell to the ground and writhed in agony. Then, before it could regain its senses, Alfonzo swung his left arm down at its neck, decapitating it.

At that moment, Alfonzo could feel movement from his [Magic Power Detection]. In fact, it was the shadows that began to move. However, before they could spring into action, they returned to normal. Then, the magic power that was causing them to move was dispersed.

'I guess Lici was able to take care of Pride.' Alfonzo thought to himself briefly.

"[Gale Cutter]." Erza chanted before swinging her sword down from a distance.

At the same time, a second chimera lunged at Alfonzo, not giving him a chance to defend himself. Before it could sink its claws into his back, however, it was split in half vertically by the wind blade Erza's attack produced.

Then, in a burst of speed, enhanced by the wind, Erza shot past Alfonzo with her sword coated in a layer of rotating winds.

"[Hurricane]." Erza chanted as she swung her sword horizontally in front of the group of chimera.

With her slash, the spinning winds were dislodged from around Erza's sword. Then, those winds enveloped a group of chimera, lifting them off the ground while simultaneously inflicting slashes upon them.

Meanwhile, Marin, with her kodachi pointed at the group of chimera on either side of the vortex Erza created, chanted her own spell.

"[Pierce]." Marin chanted quietly as Nova's blades flattened against their handguards.

In the next instant, half a dozen thin spikes shot forward from the now flattened blade. Then, despite the fact that the chimeras were moving to avoid them, the spikes pierced into all of their heads, bending with each of their movements to stay on target.

Then, with the opposing force's front line taken care of, Alfonzo cloaked himself in violet electricity and charged through Erz's [Hurricane]. Then, once he was on the other side, he flung his right arm forward.

"[Electromagnetism Magic: Supersonic Dismemberment]." Alfonzo chanted as the saw blade on his right arm was fired at the speed of a railgun.

In the next instant, the saw blade shot through more than a dozen chimeras before slamming into the large metal door at the end of the cave. Before it could impact the door, however, the mostly melted chunk of metal that used to be the saw blade was dispelled. Though, the heat from the air friction did manage to superheat the door.

"Grah~~~~~!" A high pitched, pain-filled scream could be heard from the other side of the door, just as its temperature reached its melting point.

Then, in a burst of speed, Alfonzo, who completely ignored all the chimera that tried to fill the gap his [Supersonic Dismemberment] created, appeared in front of the superheated door with the saw blade on his left arm dispelled and the palms of his hands on the nearly molten door.

Meanwhile, with their attention focused on Alfonzo, who just rushed past them, the chimeras were left defenseless when Erza and Marin tore through their ranks from behind.

"[Metal Magic: Iron Maiden]." Alfonzo chanted, believing that Erza and Marin would keep the chimera off his back.

In the next instant, the superheated metal door distorted before engulfing the one behind it who just let out that ear-piercing scream. Then, although no one could see the inside of the clump of metal, a large number of iron spikes impaled the one who was trapped inside.

With the door removed; Alfonzo could see the cavern where the homunculi gathered. And to be honest, he was thoroughly surprised.

'So, they actually set up shop in the Dragon Graveyard, huh?' Alfonzo thought to himself as he scanned the cave behind the door. 'And is that Zirconis' skeleton Father is sitting on top of? Oh, it looks like Sloth came back, too. Well, with the two sections of the [Transmutation Circle] that Lici and I completely fucked up, I guess there was no point of him continuing to dig for now. Oh, and Greed's not here. Did he already defect? Then, I guess that means Gluttony is the one stuck in my [Iron Maiden].'

"To think you would come to us instead of us having to find you." Father said from atop his throne. "That saves us a lot of trouble. Now, remove the metal that has clogged our caves and tell that girl of yours to dispel whatever she has done to Gluttony. Then, I will allow you a quick death for disrupting our plans."

"Nah, I don't think so." Alfonzo replied after refocusing his attention on Father. "Especially since I got a few bones to pick with you mother fuckers."

"And that's another reason for me to kill you!" Envy shouted as he rushed at Alfonzo with his fist reeled back, ready to strike.

"Oh, we are surprised you figured out it was us who defeated you last time." Alfonzo said mockingly in the tone he used when he acted as Venom.

"Damn you!" Envy bellowed angrily.

Before Envy could land his punch, however, Erza appeared between him and Alfonzo. Then, with two fluid slashes, she cut off his right arm, at the shoulder, and his left leg, below the knee.

"Argh~~~~!" Envy screamed in pain as he fell to the cave floor. "I'll kill you and all those whores you call your girlfriends!"

"You dare threaten those I care about?" Erza asked with a frown. "Allow me to show you the folly of speaking without thinking."

In the next instant, Erza thrust Astraia, with winds concentrated on its tip at Envy, who was on the ground, regenerating his lost limbs.

"[Squall Thrust]" Erza chanted as she thrust her sword.

Immediately. Envy rolled away from the thrust, doing all he could not to be hit by the swirling winds on the tip of the blade.

Boom!

Luckily, Envy reacted quickly enough, just barely avoiding the sword's tip, however, thanks to the winds that were discharged when the blade made contact with the ground, he was blown away, slamming into the nearest wall a moment later.

On top of that, the entire cave shook as the winds drilled into the cave floor.

"If you think that will free you from my blade, you are mistaken." Erza said coldly as she dashed towards Envy, swinging her sword once she was in range.

Boom!

Once again, the cave shook as Erza's blade impacted the wall Envy slammed into after he barely avoided Astraia's blade for a second time. This time, however, he was able to evade more cleanly with his arm and leg regenerated.

"That guy... or is it a girl?" Marin said as she, too, entered the cavern and took a position next to Alfonzo. "Eh, whatever. He must have really made Erza mad if she's chasing him around like that."

"Yeah, he threatened to kill me, you, Lici, and all the other girls." Alfonzo replied with a shrug. "Still, I guess I better do something before Erza collapses this entire cave on us."

"Yeah, that's probably a good idea." Marin replied with a nod.

Clap!

"[Metal Magic: Support Pillars]." Alfonzo chanted as he clapped his hands together forcefully.

In the next instant, several adamantine pillars grew from the ground around the cave to support the walls and ceiling while Erza continued to unleash destructive slashes in pursuit of Envy. On top of that, one of those pillars appeared beneath Sloth, raising him to the ceiling to crush him against it.

"What a pain..." Sloth said lethargically as he jumped off the top of the pillar before he could be squashed.

"By the way, who's inside this glowing chunk of metal?" Marin asked while fanning herself from the heat the superheated metal was giving off.

"Oh, if I had to guess, that's probably the one who tried to eat Lici that one time." Alfonzo said as he patted the hot metal.

Meanwhile, Father, who had yet to stand from his throne, felt his eyebrows twitching at the fact that he was being completely disregarded. However, he did his best to maintain his demeanor.

"You say you have a bone to pick with me... Or rather, us." Father said. "For what reason do you take issue with us?"

Hearing Father's voice, Alfonzo and Marin turned their attention to him.

"Besides the fact that you sick fuckers want to sacrifice so many people to make a Philosopher's Stone?" Alfonzo asked with an eyebrow raised.

A moment later, Alfonzo's killing intent exploded, washing over the entire cave, while his expression morphed into something malevolent. Though, Erza and Marin seemed to be completely unaffected by the billowing killing intent.

"It's because of you sons of bitches that mine and Lici's parents were killed by those mother fucking Zeref cultists." Alfonzo shouted angrily. "Not to mention, Erza's village was once destroyed, and she ended up as a slave, because of you sick fuckers, too."

Hearing that, while seeming to be unaffected by Alfonzo's killing intent, Father began to stroke his beard.

"If I'm not mistaken, the parents you are referring to are Bianca Marcus, formerly Bianca Rollen, and Orlando Taylor, correct?" Father asked calmly. "Unfortunate it may be that they could not be sacrificed in the creation of the Philosopher's Stone, their deaths were necessary. Or rather your mother, Bianca's death was necessary. Her [Dispel Magic] was a threat to my plans."

Hearing that, Alfonzo's anger spiked to a whole new level. Then, while glaring into Father's eyes, he thrust his hands into the glowing, superheated, mass of metal trapping Gluttony. And as he did, the tips of his fingers, coated in liquid metal, sharpened.

A moment later, Alfonzo pulled his hands out of the metal. And impaled on the tip of his right ring finger, a rapidly dimming Philosopher's Stone could be seen.

"Well, now that his body has been destroyed, I think Lici's spell binding that weird eye inside his chest should have been dispelled." Alfonzo said, basically growling at this point. "But I really don't think that fucking matters anymore."

In the next instant, before Father could reply, Sloth, a large, muscular, pale skinned man with stringy black hair that runs down his back, a blank, white left eye, a red pattern running from where his right eye should be to his right palm, and sharp teeth wearing black pants and shoes, appeared in front of Alfonzo in a burst of speed with is arm cocked back, ready to throw a punch.

"Restraint]." Marin chanted from Alfonzo's side.

In the next instant, the kodachi in Marin's left hand elongated into a thin band. Then, it wrapped itself around Sloth's arm. However, thanks to Sloth's physical strength, his punch was barely slowed down, at all.

"Can't you see they're having a conversation?" Marin asked as the blade of her kodachi thinned into a thread as it spiraled around Sloth's arm at high speed. "[Cut]."

In the next instant, Sloth's arm was removed completely. On top of that, the severed arm was diced into slices of meat and bone. As a result, the only thing that happened was blood spraying from Sloth's shoulder.

Luckily, Alfonzo was able to see the sneak attack coming. So, while Marin moved to stop Sloth's attack, Alfonzo raised a barrier of adamantine between himself and Sloth's fist. As a result, all the blood that sprayed at him was blocked by the slab of metal.

Meanwhile, Sloth looked down at the spot where his arm used to be with a frown that showed off his sharp teeth.

"Such a pain." Sloth grumbled. "Regrowing limbs is such a pain. Fighting with wizards is such a pain."

"If it's such a pain..." Marin said, having leapt into the air with her magic power saturating her right leg, why don't you go over there and take a nap!"

Bang!

With that, Marin swung her leg at Sloth with all the power she could muster. Then, when her foot connected with the side of Sloth's face, half of his skull collapsed while he was sent flying into one of the pillars Alfonzo raised to support the cave's ceiling.

"Geez, these homunculi don't' have any manners." Marin said as she landed next to Alfonzo. "They don't even know how rude it is to interrupt someone's conversation. Anyway, I'll take care of the big guy, Fonzie. You just worry about their leader."

"Thanks, Marin." Alfonzo said without taking his eyes off of Father. Then, as Gluttony's Philosopher's Stone evaporated into particles, he continued. "He's not gonna live for much longer if I have anything to say about it, though."

Hearing that and seeing how easily his creations were being dealt with, Father finally stood from his throne. Then, with calm, assured steps, he walked down from atop the dragon's skeleton.

"It would seem I've made a mistake allowing you the chance to grow." Father said with his hands clasped behind his back once he reached the cave floor. Then, with his expression turning vicious, he continued. "A mistake I'll have to rectify, it would seem."