

Fairy Tail 711

Chapter 711: Irene and Minerva

Around the time the party at the Sixth Sense Hotel ended, the members of Team Sabertooth were finally released from the Domus Flau's infirmary, with Minerva being the last one released, as her injuries were the most severe. Meaning, Team Sabertooth, along with Lector and Frosch were walking through the streets of Crocus on their way back to their lodgings.

'I wonder how I should break it to the others that I will be leaving the guild?' Minerva, walking at the back of the group, thought to herself. 'That was the deal for Irene to save me from my father's tyranny. Still, I've been a member of Sabertooth for as long as it has existed. I really don't wanna leave it behind.'

"Hey, do you think Master is going to punish you guys for not winning the Grand Magic Games?" Lector asked while using his [Aera Magic] to fly next to Sting.

"Definitely." Sting replied in a downcast tone. "He's gonna be really angry because we couldn't follow his orders."

"This time we should be pardoned, though." Rogue said in a flat tone. "Both Sting and I, while using [White and Shadow Drive] were no match for him. And I don't think using [Dragon Force] would have made much of a difference, either."

"Does that mean you can't beat that guy from Fairy Tail, Rogue?" Frosch asked as he tilted his head cutely while standing on Rogue's shoulder.

"Unfortunately, that seems to be the case." Rufus said while shaking his head. "If he had enough time, he could probably defeat everyone who participated in the Grand Magic Game by himself."

"Damn that guy!" Orga growled. "No matter what, I'm gonna get revenge on him for humiliating me like that."

Zap!

In Orga's anger, he unconsciously flared his magic power. As a result, several arcs of black lightning jumped off his body and lightly damaged the surroundings.

"Calm down, Orga." Minerva said strictly, Orga's outburst pulling her out of her thoughts. "I don't think that's a good idea. Especially since we provoked him into acting so harshly against us."

"What do you mean?' Sting asked curiously while everyone else, other than Rufus turned to look at Minerva quizzically.

"*Sigh* The three of you really don't pay attention to anything other than fighting, do you?" Rufus asked in a tired tone. "Well, do you remember when I insulted Alfonzo Marcus' wife before we were introduced on the first day?"

Immediately, Rufus and Minerva could see question marks floating over the heads of the other three members and Lector. Frosch, on the other hand, only wore a happy go lucky expression, as always.

"Well, that did happen." Minerva said, deciding not to dwell on the IQs of her guild mates. "And the reason was that neither Rufus nor I could see us defeating Fairy Tail."

"What?" Sting, Rogue, and Orga exclaimed in unison.

"You never thought we could win?" Rogue asked, sounding quite indignant. "But Sabertooth is the---"

"No, it's not." Minerva said sternly, cutting off Rogue's use of the guild's usual saying. "And these last few days should have made that quite clear."

Hearing the tone of Minerva's voice and the look in her eyes, Rogue could do nothing but lower his head. Even Sting and Orga did not know what to say.

"Anyway, I was hoping that Alfonzo would be disqualified after attacking us outside an event after I insulted his wife, Elicia." Rufus continued after a few moments of silence. "But he saw right through it. As a result, he made it a point to keep us down as much as he possibly could during the Grand Magic Games."

Now that Rufus mentioned it, Sting, Rogue, and Orga vaguely remembered something like that. Meanwhile, Lector completely recalled Alfonzo's statement after he defeated Orga in the first Battle Round. Frosch, on the other hand, only tilted his head to the other side with the same happy-go-lucky smile on his face.

"Basically, it's our fault we didn't do better in the Games this year." Minerva said. "And for that, I'm sorry."

After speaking, Minerva bowed her head, which caught the others off guard.

"No, Princess, it's not your fault!" Sting exclaimed. "You were just trying to help us win, that's all!"

"Sting is right." Rogue added. "It's not your fault that plans don't always work out."

"Yeah, what they said." Orga said.

"Besides, you should not take all the blame alone, Princess." Rufus said as he, too, bowed in apology. "I was the one who suggested the plan, after all. Besides, it was also me who carried out the plan. But we underestimated Alfonzo's breath of mind."

"*Sigh* I hope they are this forgiving when they find out that I betrayed the guild to free myself of my father's influence."

With that, and an awkward mood hanging in the air, the seven from Sabertooth continued towards their lodgings. However, when they eventually arrived and entered the lobby, Sting, Rogue, Rufus, Orga, and Lector were thoroughly confused while Minerva was expecting a scene like this. As for Frosch... Well, it didn't need to be mentioned.

Currently, the other members of the guild, though they were not panicking, they were all exuding a confused and nervous atmosphere. On top of that, the way they turned their heads towards the doors as soon as Team Sabertooth walked through the door was quite off-putting.

"What's going on here?" Sting asked in a confused tone.

"I'm not sure." Rufus replied. "But everyone looks so uneasy."

"Well, let's just ask." Orga said loudly as he took large steps towards the nearest guild mate. He then grabbed the male wizard by his shirt and turned him towards himself. "Hey, what's going on here? Why is everyone acting so..."

Reaching that point, as Orga could not come up with the right word, he waved his arm towards the rest of the guild members in the hotel lobby. Meanwhile, the wizard Orga grabbed initially showed fear when he was grabbed. However, when he noticed that it was Orga, he calmed down quickly.

"Oh, Orga... It's you." The wizard said. "Sorry about that. Everyone is on edge because Master has yet to return. And because he left before the event ended, we're worried something might have happened to him."

"But who could have done anything to Master?" Sting ask curiously as he and the others approached Orga and the wizard in his grasp. "I mean, Master is strong. And if someone had attacked him, there would have been a real big commotion, right?"

"You would think so." Rufus muttered. "But this... This seems impossible. Even if Master was no match for anyone who might have attacked him, his [Blast Magic] would have drawn a lot of attention."

"We need to form a search party and look for him." Rogue said in a solemn tone.

"I agree." Rufus said with a nod. He then turned to Minerva and continued. "Princess, you should wait here in case he comes back. The rest of us will split into groups and search the city. Is that plan satisfactory."

In response, Minerva nodded her head. And with that, the rest of the guild split into groups led by Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga before they left the hotel to start the search for Jiemma.

It did not take long for the hotel to be emptied out of all the Sabertooth members except for Minerva. And when she noticed that she was alone, she took fatigued steps towards the landing where Jiemma would usually sit to address the guild. Then, she stopped in front of the throne he had set up for his sole use.

"I guess you'll never sit in this seat again, will you, Father?" Minerva asked as she ran her hand along the throne's arm rest. "To be honest, even having a thrown like this showed that you did not see us as a guild. Rather, it felt more like you were a king ruling over your subjects. And Sabertooth was the name of your kingdom."

Reaching that point, Minerva pulled her hand away from the arm rest. Then, she turned around before plopping herself onto the seat.

"*Sigh* I wonder what will happen to the guild after I leave..." Minerva said as she lowered her head and cupped her face in her hands. "I wonder who would end up being the guild master. Maybe Sting would be a good fit. No, keeping him in one place long enough to fill out any paperwork would be enough to make an S-Class quest all by itself."

"Why don't you become the guild master?"

Hearing that familiar voice coming from behind her, Minerva was naturally surprised. However, it was not for the obvious reason of being snuck up on.

"What do you mean?" Minerva asked as she raised her head and looked over her left shoulder towards the owner of the voice with a thoroughly flabbergasted expression on her face. "I thought I had to agree to join Fairy Tail to get your help."

"Oh, that was just to test how serious you were about freeing yourself from your father." The owner of the voice, Irene, said as she walked around the throne and stopped in front of Minerva. "From what I can tell, you see the members of your guild as family. And I'm not so heartless that I would separate you from your family."

"Anymore, anyway." Irene thought to herself, finishing her sentence internally.

Hearin that, Minerva looked Irene with a complicated expression. All this time, she had been agonizing about betraying her guild for her benefit alone. But now she just found out that all that was for nothing.

"*Sigh* I see." Minerva said with a tired sigh after staring at Irene for a few moments. "Well then, I thank you for your help. I would have liked the chance to study under a wizard as strong as you, though."

After saying that, Minerva was confused when she saw Irene tilt her head in confusion.

"Why wouldn't you be able to study under me anymore?" Irene asked curiously.

"Because I'm not a member of your guild?" Minerva said, though it sounded more like a question.

"Oh, Sweetie, I don't care about that." Irene said with a smile. "Other than a few of Fairy Tail's secret techniques, I don't mind teaching you everything that I can to make you stronger. That way, you and your guild might actually be a challenge for Alfonzo and the others in a few years."

"Hahaha..." Minerva could only laugh dryly at that. "Look, I'm not lacking confidence in my abilities in any way. But I really don't see a few years being enough to deal with that group of monsters."

"Does that mean you're giving up?" Irene asked curiously with her smile still present on her face.

"Of course not." Minerva replied. "Just because a few years won't be enough doesn't mean Sabertooth won't one day be the strongest guild in Fiore. And not just because of a title earned in the Grand Magic Games."

Hearing that, Irene's smile widened.

"Then, allow me to give you a little advice." Irene said as she turned around. "Request an alliance with Fairy Tail as soon as you can. Then, once it's been established, make an order for new training facilities from Alfonzo. Because without them, you'll have no way of keeping up with most of the top guilds in Fiore."

With that, Irene started walking down the stairs leading to the landing.

"I won't deny that you're all quite strong. Jiemma must have done something right." Irene continued. "But you're all reaching your physical limits. And that will lead to you all reaching your magical limits, as well. But Alfonzo's training chambers can fix that."

"I understand." Minerva replied. "I'll do my best to make that happen. But what should I tell the rest of the guild about my father's untimely demise?"

"Hmm...?" Irene hummed in confusion. A moment later, however, she realized that she never told Minerva what she intended to do with Jiemma. "Oh, he's not dead. I actually let him go. Figured you would want to put that chapter of your life behind you with your own hands at some point. I mean, I did tell you I would make you strong enough that you would never have to fear him again, didn't I?"

Minerva froze for a moment when she heard that. The thought of confronting her father still weighing on her. However, that did not last long. She eventually nodded her head emphatically.

"I understand." Minerva said. "I can't let the fear he instilled into me control me any longer."

"As for what you should tell your guild mates, let them see this." Irene said after nodding at the conviction in Minerva's tone. "You can tell them about what your father tried to do to you in the infirmary, too. You can tell them that I stopped him, if you want, as well."

With that, Irene took off her hat before pulling an envelope out of it. Then, she flicked it over her shoulder towards Minerva, who caught it with no issue.

"You'll have to come up with a believable story as to how you got that information, though." Irene said as she continued to walk towards the hotel's front entrance. "Just keep me and Fairy Tail out of it. Got it?"

"I got it." Minerva replied while looking down at the envelope in her hands.

After that, without even a goodbye, Irene pulled open the hotel's door. Then, she left. Meanwhile, Minerva opened the envelope and began reading its contents. However, when she saw what it said, she was at first confused. Then, she was struck by disbelief before it morphed into anger as she fought to not crush the papers in her hand.

The information in the envelope was proof of Jiemma's association with the Dark Guild, Tartaros. Then, after showing the information to the rest of Sabertooth when they returned from their searches and explaining that she hired an information broker to find her father, yet received this information instead, Jiemma was named a Dark Wizard before the end of the next day.

As for Sabertooth, they needed to choose a new guild master. Though, no one was ready to take that position yet. Especially since the strongest members of the guild all wanted to redeem themselves in next year's Grand Magic Games.

Chapter 712: The Celebration Banquet; Part 1

While most of the members of Fairy Tail were sleeping in their rooms after the hotel staff brought them there after the brawl in the dining hall, Irene strolled into the Sixth Sense Hotel with a satisfied expression on her face.

She then, without lingering in the lobby, stepped into the elevator and pressed the button for the top floor, where the suite she was staying with Alfonzo and his other women was located. Then, after a short walk, she made her way to the suite and opened the door.

"I'm back." Irene said as she entered the room.

"Welcome back." Alfonzo said. "So, how did everything go? Did you get anew apprentice?"

"I did." Irene said cheerfully as she closed the door behind her. She then started walking over to Alfonzo, who was going over some reports about Sixth Sense Holdings' earnings during the Grand Magic Games, before plopping down in his lap as she continued. "I made Jiemma run away, too. Now, Sabertooth is without a guild master, but I'm sure they can figure that out for themselves."

Seeing Irene in such a good mood, Alfonzo put down the report in his hand. Then, he wrapped his arms around the buxom redhead's waist and stole a kiss. After that, with her smile growing even wider, Irene recounted what she did after she saw Jiemma leave the stands when Minerva was defeated in the Grand Magic Game.

"Honestly, I didn't expect her to tell her dad about your offer while laid up in a hospital bed." Alfonzo said while shaking his head. "But I guess the stress of the situation and the helping hand you held out to her pushed her over the edge in the end."

"Yes, it was quite entertaining." Irene said with a nod.

"*Sigh* we really need to do something about that sadistic streak of yours." Alfonzo mumbled.

"Well, I can think of a way for you to help with that." Irene whispered into Alfonzo's ear in a seductive tone. "Besides, I didn't get enough yesterday."

Alfonzo could only smile wryly in response. Though, he seemed fine to work after such a long event, he was actually pretty tired. He used quite a bit of his magic power reserves during the fights with Yoruichi and Sui-Feng, and Yoruichi, Sting, and Rogue. Plus, he had quite the headache from overclocking [Lightning Enhancement] so that he could make surpassing Yoruichi in speed look so easy.

Irene, on the other hand, smiled even wider when she saw Alfonzo's reluctance.

"Good." Irene said as she stood up and grabbed Alfonzo by the arm. "I'm glad you can see things my way. And since I'm sure you're quite tired, you can leave everything to me. Don't worry, I promise I'll be gentle."

"Something tells me that's not true at all." Alfonzo muttered as he allowed himself to be pulled out of his chair towards an empty bedroom in the suite.

However, contrary to Alfonzo's expectations, Irene did not go full sadist when they entered the room. Instead, she gently took Alfonzo's clothes off before taking off her own, as well. Then, she laid down with him and hugged his head into her bosom while gently rubbing his head until Alfonzo fell asleep, Irene falling asleep shortly afterwards.

July 8, x790.

Time passed quickly after that. The following day, however, all of Crocus was shaken by the news that Jiemma, the master of the Sabertooth guild had fled Crocus after proof of his involvement with the Dark Guild Tartaros was reported in the evening news. Unfortunately, that also led to the members of Sabertooth being investigated during the night and following day.

Luckily, the evidence was rather clear cut. So, it did not take long for the rest of Sabertooth to be cleared of suspicion. And as it so happened, the investigation also ended fast enough that they were able to attend the customary banquet held by the Fiore Royal Family to congratulate all the guilds who participated in the Grand Magic Games.

This banquet was a formal event held by the Royal Family every year. So, all the wizards present were dressed much better than usual. For example, Alfonzo was wearing a three-piece suit with a black jacket and slacks, a blue vest, a black shirt, and a black tie with a blue Fairy Tail emblem embroidered on it. Meanwhile, Elicia wore a black, off the shoulder, long-sleeved evening gown with a slit that exposed her right leg and a large pink flower sewn onto the right side of her waist.

Even the three children were attending and dressed to impress while Grayfia, Maria, and Miyuki were assigned to look after them during the banquet, should they for whatever reason be separated from their parents.

After a short speech from King Toma E. Fiore, where he congratulated Fairy Tail for regaining the title of Strongest Guild in Fiore and handed over the prize money of thirty million Jewels, the banquet began and the wizards from the guilds were finally allowed to mingle. And the banquet, though upscale, was as rowdy as one would expect when so many wizards gathered in one place.

"Lyon!" Ur said with a rarely heard level of intensity.

Hearing Ur's voice, Lyon tensed for a moment. He then turned away from Gray and Juvia, the latter he was trying to flirt with and steal from Gray and turned to look at his Master in [Ice-Make Magic], who was approaching with a sweet smile on her face that for some reason sent chills down Gray's and Lyon's spines.

"Master, it's good to see you." Lyon said in a somewhat uneasy tone. "I'm sorry I haven't been able to come see you in a while. But I've been busy with quests. I hope you can forgive me."

Instead of replying immediately, Ur just continued to look at Lyon, making the silver-haired wizard start to sweat nervously. Meanwhile, Gray discreetly pulled Juvia away, not wanting to get caught up in what he knew was coming.

"Lyon, I have to say, I'm disappointed in your performance during this year's Grand Magic Games." Ur said calmly. "Other than when you eliminated Might Guy of Quatro Cerberus, you did not gain a single victory. And even that could hardly be called a victory. So, I had a discussion with Master Ooba."

When he heard Ur start talking, the sweat streaming down Lyon's forehead increased. Yet, when he heard that she spoke to Ooba Babasama, Lyon's knees almost gave out. Because he could tell what was coming next. And when Ur placed a hand on his shoulder and spoke in a gentle tone, his suspicions were proven correct.

"I asked her if I could retrain you." Ur said sweetly. "And she agreed. So, you'll be coming back to Magnolia with me after the banquet. Then, I'll be training both you and Gray again from the basics. And this special training will not end until I'm satisfied with your growth."

Immediately, the light in Lyon's eyes went out, despair clouding his expression.

"Hey! Why am I being drawn into this?" Gray shouted, having not gotten far enough to miss Ur's declaration. "I wouldn't have gotten my ass kicked as bad as Lyon did. In fact, I last a lot longer whenever I spar with Lici!"

"But you've never won, either." Ur shot back without mercy. She then continued with a vein bulging on her forehead. "And put your damn clothes back on! Stop embarrassing the guild like that!"

Meanwhile, when Lyon heard Gray shout, he instinctively turned his head towards his brother disciple. And when he did, his eyes lit up. Not because he had a thing for Gray. Rather, it was because he saw Juvia, shooting a jet of blood from each nostril and about to lose consciousness at the sight of his nearly naked body.

"I understand." Lyon said in a determined tone. "I'll follow you back to Magnolia to undergo training. I thank you for your care, Master."

Raising an eyebrow at Lyon's change in attitude, Ur turned to look at Gray and Juvia. Then, she grinned. Meanwhile, Gray also understood why Lyon's attitude changed while he held Juvia, who was acting like she was punch drunk, in his arms. He then glared at Lyon.

"Stop having ideas about Juvia." Gray said harshly. "She's mine and I won't give her up to you."

"I think that's for her to decide, Gray." Lyon said calmly while staring at Juvia with hearts in his eyes. "And as long as I can show her that I'm better than you, she'll come to me on her own."

"Damn you, Lyon!" Gray shouted, wanting to rush over and punch Lyon in the face.

Meanwhile, in another part of the ball room, Irene was sipping a glass of wine while watching Amar'e and Bianca explore their surroundings with Grayfia and Maria trying their best to keep them out of trouble. Luckily, Calvin was not quite old enough to be running around, as well. Otherwise, the banquet would be even more chaotic than usual.

"Hmm... Maybe I should have another child with Alfonzo." Irene thought to herself allowed. "I'm sure Erza would enjoy having a younger sibling. Plus, raising a child might be worth doing since I missed the opportunity with her."

"Excuse me." A female voice said, drawing Irene's attention away from the children and her own thoughts. "I hope I'm not interrupting you, Master Irene."

Turning towards the voice, Irene was not surprised when she laid her eyes on Minerva, who was dressed in an elegant qipao-style dress.

"Oh, it's you." Irene said nonchalantly. "Do you need me for anything? It's not like I can start training you here and now."

If anyone who knew her saw Minerva at this moment, they would be thoroughly dumbfounded by what they saw. Currently, Minerva was fidgeting nervously in response to Irene's question. However, she eventually gritted her teeth and spoke what was on her mind.

"Do you... Um... think you could introduce me to Alfonzo Marcus?" Minerva asked with her head lowered. "I want to... apologize for what I tried to do during the Games."

"Oh." Irene intoned as she raised an eyebrow in amusement. "Sure, why not. Come along."

With that, and without waiting for a response, Irene turned around and strode towards where she could feel Alfonzo's presence with a smile on her face. Minerva also did not hesitate to follow her. However, when they reached Alfonzo, who was sitting with Elicia, Mirajane, and Shizuka, with Calvin in Shizuka's arms, they were just in time to see Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga arrive in front of him.

Then, before she could ask what her guild mates were doing, Minerva saw the four wizards bow at their waists.

"Please forgive us!" Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga shouted in unison, drawing the attention of those nearby.

"I know what we tried to do was despicable." Rufus continued. "And I take full responsibility for the plan we tried to enact.. So, if you have any anger towards our guild, please take it out on me alone."

"No way, Rufus!" Sting shouted. "At the very least, the four of us should all be punished."

"Sting is right." Rogue said in his usual tone. "We're a team. So, the responsibility lies with all of us."

"Yeah." Orga added. "Don't try to take all the responsibility on your own."

With that, the four began to bicker over who was responsible while Alfonzo, Elicia, and Mirajane watched them with amusement flashing in their eyes. Meanwhile, Shizuka was smiling at Calvin, who was reaching out to play with Lector and Frosch, who landed on the table they were sitting at and hovered around the baby.

A few moments later, the bickering stopped. Though, it did not seem as if a resolution was reached. Even so, the four Sabertooth wizards all turned back to Alfonzo and once again spoke in unison.

"No matter who you blame for what happened, just know that the Princess had nothing to do with it."

"Oh my, it would seem you are quite loved, wouldn't it, Minerva?" Irene said as she stepped towards the spectacle.

After saying that, Irene glanced over her shoulder. And she could not help but giggle when she saw the embarrassed blush on Minerva's face.

At the same time, Irene's voice drew everyone's attention to her and Minerva. And like Irene, Alfonzo, Elicia, and Mirajane could not help giggling when they saw Minerva's expression. Meanwhile, Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga wore similarly embarrassed expressions after being caught trying to steer the blame away from Minerva.

"*Sigh* What are you four doing?" Minerva asked after she managed to get her blushing under control.

"Nothing." X 4

Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga replied to Minerva's question in unison while turning their heads away to avoid making eye contact with her. However, Minerva's stare that was boring into them was making them sweat nervously. Luckily, just before one of them could crack and spill the beans, Alfonzo spoke up, giving them a way out.

"Well, I don't blame any of you for what happened." Alfonzo said with a shrug and an amused smile on his face. "I mean, I read about your former guild master. So, I'm guessing he put you up to doing something like that. So, you don't need to worry about it."

Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga exchanged confused glances upon hearing Alfonzo's response to their apology. However, they did not know how to react. Not being the sharpest tools in the shed, Sting, Rogue, and Orga were confused because Minerva and Rufus had admitted to them that it was the two of them who made the plan to get Alfonzo and Team Fairy Tail disqualified. Rufus, on the other hand, just did not know how to react to the fact that Alfonzo let it go so easily.

"Then, we'll thank you for your understanding." Minerva said, quickly interjecting before any of the less intelligent members of her team could say something to change Alfonzo's opinion. "And now that the truth about my father's misdeeds has come to light, there is no reason for Sabertooth to isolate itself any longer. So, as the acting guild master, I would like to formally request an alliance with Fairy Tail."

As Minerva finished her sentence, she bowed to show her sincerity. However, Alfonzo could only smile wryly at her request.

"Slow down a little." Alfonzo said while raising a hand. "That's something you should take up with our guild master, you know?"

"Yeah, Ur is the one who deals with things like that." Elicia added with a smile. "But she's around here somewhere. Probably scolding her disciples. I'm sure you'll be able to find her easy enough."

"Still, it's a good thing you know about this beforehand, Alfonzo." Mirajane said with a grin. "Because if an alliance is formed, you know she's gonna ask you to take a trip to their guild hall, right?"

"*Sigh* I know." Alfonzo replied. "Just so long as I get paid, I'll make it happen, though."

While Sting, Rogue, Rufus, and Orga were confused by the conversation happening at the table, Minerva's eyes lit up, as Irene had told her about the training chambers a couple of nights ago. And it would be a lie if she said she was not interested in something that could help make her guild stronger.

"Alfonzo, save me!"

Yet, before any of the confused Sabertooth wizards could ask any questions, a woman's panicked and scared voice rang out over the ball room. And when Alfonzo recognized it to be Erza's voice, he stood up from his seat with a frown on his face.

"It looks like the little perfume gremlin hasn't learned his lesson yet." Alfonzo muttered in an annoyed tone. "I'll be right back. I just need to put that fake gentleman in his place."

Zap!

Then before anyone could react, Alfonzo disappeared in a flash of violet light. Then, a shout of "Men~~~~~!" rang out over the ball room accompanied by the sound of flesh pummeling flesh. Yet, because this had become such a common occurrence over the years, no one really paid it any mind and the banquet continued.

Chapter 713: The Celebration Banquet; Part 2

Flash!

Clap!

"Hey, Gremlin, what are you doing to my wife?" Alfonzo asked as he appeared between Erza and Ichiya from a flash of violet light.

Then, as soon as he appeared, Alfonzo clapped his hand around Ichiya's wrist, which was reaching out to hold Erza's hand. At the same time, Erza, who was on the verge of [Requipping] a sword into her hand, quickly hid behind Alfonzo.

"Ah! Alfonzo, my friend." Ichiya, his attitude not bothered at all from being stopped, said happily. "Come, let us sit together and have a cup of tea. Also, allow me to introduce you to my new friend. I'm sure the two of you would get along swimmingly."

"*Sigh* That's all fine and good, Ichiya." Alfonzo said while narrowing his eyes at the shorter man. "But how many times do I have to tell you not to try and put your hands on Erza. You call me your friend, but you can't do something so simple?"

"Ah! Yes, it would seem I have blundered once again." Ichiya said, though his smile did not make it seem as he was very remorseful.

Ichiya then took a step forward and raised his hands, trying to put them on Alfonzo's and Erza's backs to push them towards his new friend, Guy. However, before he could touch either of them, Alfonzo swiftly turned around and kicked him away.

Bang!

"Men~~~~~!" Ichiya shouted while flying across the ball room.

However, as this was a yearly occurrence, no one paid Ichiya any mind. Instead, they only glanced at him for a moment before returning to their own conversations. Some of the attendees did not even look at him, opting to focus on stuffing their faces with all the free food.

And one of those indulging in the food was Natsu, who was accompanied by Lisanna, Happy, and Miyako. However, his eating spree would be interrupted shortly.

"Natsu!"

Hearing his name shouted in a competitive tone, Natsu, who was holding a giant turkey drumstick, paused just before he could take a bite. He then turned his head in the direction of the shout. Happy, Lisanna, and Miyako also turned to look, as well.

When they did, they saw Sting, with Lector standing on his right shoulder, approaching with a determined expression on his face.

On a side note, as soon as Alfonzo left to deal with Ichiya, the five Sabertooth wizards left the table where Elicia, Mirajane, and Shizuka were sitting, as well. While Minerva went with Irene to meet Ur so she could establish an alliance with Fairy Tail, Rufus and Orga went to mingle with the other wizards, Rufus trying to improve relations with the others.

As for Sting and Rogue, they took similar actions. They went to find two of Fairy Tail's Dragon Slayers, Natsu Dragneel and Gajeel Redfox, respectively.

"Hmm?" Natsu hummed in confusion. "Who are you?"

When Sting, who had been looking for Natsu specifically, heard that, he stumbled over his own feet. He managed to catch himself quickly enough, though.

"Natsu, how did you forget who he is?" Lisanna asked in an exasperated tone. "That's Sting Eucliffe, the White Dragon Slayer from Sabertooth."

Hearing that Lisanna knew who he was, Sting straightened his back proudly. Yet, Natsu's next words made him fall to the floor in shock.

"Oh, he's the guy that kept taking balls to the face from Alfonzo, right?" Natsu asked after a moment of contemplation.

"Pause!" Alfonzo's voice rang out over the ball room immediately afterwards.

After falling to the floor, Sting looked at Natsu with resentment. Yet, Natsu looked quite confused about why Sting came to find him.

Meanwhile, Lector landed on the table and stared down Happy.

"So, there are more cats like me and Frosch, huh?" Lector asked. "Well, you don't look like anything special to me."

"He's literally a talking cat that flies." Lisanna said in a deadpan tone, that Lector ignored.

"Well, you're nothing special, either." Happy said before taking a bite of a fish he was holding in his arms. "I bet you don't even have a girlfriend."

"Wait! You! You have a girlfriend?" Lector asked while pointing at Happy in disbelief.

"Yup, and she loves~~~~ me." happy said happily. "Then again, you probably don't even know about the other Exceeds, do you?"

Unfortunately, the rest of what Happy had to say was completely ignored by Lector, as he dropped to his knees and started pounding his little paws on the top of the table, jealous of the fact that Happy had a girlfriend and he did not.

Meanwhile, Sting finally managed to stand back to his feet. First, he glanced at Lector, who seemed to have been defeated already. Then, he turned back to Natsu, glancing at Lisanna and Miyako along the way.

"Natsu Dragneel, fight me." Sting said. "I'll show you who the strongest Dragon Slayer is."

In the past, this would have been enough to make Natsu drop everything and fight. However, even someone as thick headed as Natsu matured a little after having a child. So, instead of immediately accepting Sting's offer, he looked at Lisanna, who was smiling very sweetly, yet very menacingly.

Natsu then looked at Miyako, who was staring at him with stars in her eyes. Even though most of the fights she had seen Natsu involved in were at the guild hall in Magnolia and resulted in losses, she enjoyed seeing him fight. Though, like her father, she seemed to like fights in general.

"Well, I don't mind fighting you." Natsu said after grinning at Miyako. "But not now. I don't wanna get my daughter involved."

Hearing Natsu's reply, Lisanna nodded her head approvingly.

'If only he could show this much self-control at the guild hall.' Lisanna thought to herself. '*Sigh* But I can't blame it all on Natsu. Sometimes, the fights start so fast that there's no time to think.'

"Your daughter?" Sting asked in a dumbfounded tone while staring at Miyako, who waved at him with a smile on her face. "I never thought you, of all people, would ever have a child. I mean, you were just so..."

"Huh? What do you mean?" Natsu asked curiously. "You make it sound like you know me."

"*Sigh* Do you ever listen, Natsu?" Lisanna asked. "Igneel told you that you used to meet up with the other dragon slayers for joint training when you were a kid, remember?"

"Oh, yeah... That's right." Natsu replied. Though, it was clear that he did not actually remember.

Sting on the other hand, had a much bigger reaction to Lisanna's reprimand. His eyes opened wide. Then, he lunged forward and grabbed Natsu by his collar.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Natsu asked while swiping Sting's arms away.

Unfortunately, Sting was not prepared for the superhuman level of strength Natsu had after not being trapped in the [Fairy Sphere] for the last six years.

Bang!

Meaning, Sting was sent flying into the nearest wall, leaving cracks in the stone wall after he was imbedded into it. Yet, despite the fact that his entire body hurt at the moment, Sting climbed out of the human-shaped indent he left in the wall and slowly made his way over to Natsu once again.

"What do you mean, Igneel told you?" Sting asked as he reached out to grab Natsu again.

At that moment, Lisanna realized she said more than she should have. She then lunged at Natsu and clamped her hand over his mouth. Then, she smiled at Sting.

"That's actually a secret of our guild." Lisanna said with a drop of nervous sweat dripping down her forehead. But if you really want to know, you should ask Alfonzo. If he's in a good mood, he might tell you about it."

"Look, I only wanna know where I can find Weisslogia." Sting said, a hint of pleading in his tone.

"*Sigh* Sorry man." Natsu said in a sympathetic tone, something quite uncharacteristic for him, after taking Lisanna's hand off his mouth. "As much as I wanna help you out, I can't break the guild rules again."

Reaching that point, Natsu's expression turned to one filled with fear and he began to shake violently.

"I can't go through 'That' again, man." Natsu said, sounding as though he were on the verge of a mental breakdown. "I just can't!"

Stepping back in surprise at Natsu's change, Stings expression hardened as he started looking around the ball room to find Alfonzo again. He finally found a clue to where he could find the dragon that raised him, the White Dragon, Weisslogia, and he had no intention of letting it go.

Meanwhile, around the time that Sting found Natsu, Rogue also found Gajeel. However, instead of just walking up to him, Rogue stood a short distance away as he watched Gajeel kneeling on one knee in front of a petite, blue-haired, female wizard.

"I think I came at a bad time." Rogue muttered.

"Frosch thinks so, too." Frosch, who was standing on Rogue's shoulder, added.

With no further words, Rogue and Frosch just watched the spectacle in front of them. However, they were not surprised when the blue-haired wizard, Levy McGarden, covered her mouth after Gajeel pulled a small box out of his pocket.

"Levy McGarden, will you---" Gajeel started to ask. "Argh! Damn it! These two are getting in the way at a time like this, too?"

Bang!

However, what did surprise Rogue and Frosch was the fact that a blur slammed into Gajeel before he could finish, sending him flying. A moment later, the blur materialized into a man of average height with slicked back orange hair who turned around to look at Levy pleadingly.

"Levy, please don't do this." The orange-haired man, Jet, said in a desperate tone. "At least give me a chance."

"[Plant Magic: Knuckle Plant]."

Bang!

Yet, before Levy could respond, a plant seed rolled over to Jet's feet. Then, it grew rapidly into a vine with a fist-shaped end before the vine punched Jet in the chin, sending him flying, as well.

A moment later, a slightly shorter wizard with black hair and a plant stem shaped tuft of hair on top of his head rushed in front of Levy. However, he did not seem to notice the angry expression the petite wizard was wearing.

"No, give me a chance, Levy." The black-haired wizard, Droy, rushed to say. "No one cares about you more than I--- Ahh~~~~~!"

"[Solid Script Magic: Electrocute]." Levy chanted as she wrote the name of her spell, [Electrocute], in the air with a [Light Pen] she always carried on her.

Unfortunately, Droy was too engrossed in his own feelings to notice when Levy drew her [Light Pen]. So, when the [Electrocute] spell hit him, it hurt much more than it usually would because he never saw it coming.

Then, after dealing with Droy, Levy turned to Jet, who was just about to pick himself up from the ground.

"[Solid Script Magic: Glue]." Levy chanted as she wrote another word in the air.

Levy then pushed the word, [Glue], towards Jet. Then, just as it was right above him, each letter burst into globs of ultra-sticky magical glue before pouring down over him. As a result, Jet was unable to get off the floor. Instead, the only thing he could do was stare at Levy in confusion.

"Gajeel Redfox." Levy said in a stern, fed-up, no nonsense tone. "Get the hell over here and finish what you started, right now!"

Levy then turned to look at Jet and the barely conscious Droy with a deep frown on her face.

"As for the two of you," Levy said in a menacing, yet disappointed tone. "I've had enough of the two of you getting in the way of my relationship with Gajeel. So, let me make myself clear. This will be the last time. Do you understand?"

Instead of replying, both Jet and Droy lowered their heads in both shame and frustration.

"I asked you a question." Levy said sharply. "Do. I. Make. Myself. Clear?"

"Yes, Levy." Jet and Droy replied in unison. Though, their tones were much weaker than usual.

"Good." Levy said with a nod. She then turned her head only to see Gajeel standing in front of her with a smile that was equal parts loving and thrilled at the dominance Levy just showed. "Well, get to it."

Thud!

Without a word, Gajeel dropped to one knee again. Then he held the box out in front of him before opening it to reveal a ring made of what appeared to be orichalcum with a diamond set into it.

"Levy McGarden, will you marry me?" Gajeel asked with the same time on his face.

"Yes." Levy replied simply as she reached out, took the ring out of the box, and put it on her own left ring finger. "Seriously, I was wondering how much longer you were gonna make me wait. I almost bought myself a damn ring."

"Hahahaha!" Instead of getting angry at Levy's brashness, Gajeel laughed uproariously. Then, he stood up and swept Levy off her feet, causing her to lose her harsh expression, as well. Then, the two shared a kiss.

Cheer~~~~~!

On top of that, the little commotion caused by Jet and Droy had already drawn the attention of most of the ball room. So, when they saw the successful engagement, everyone cheered.

"I think I'll wait until later to challenge him." Rogue said as he slowly turned around. "Now definitely isn't the time."

"Frosch thinks so, too." Frosch said with a smile that was just a little bit wider than his usual smile.

Chapter 714: There's Always More Work to Do

Boom!

The sound of two fists colliding sounded throughout the largest training room on the Fairy Tail guild hall's tenth floor. Shortly after that, the two combatants, Alfonzo and Natsu separated at a speed faster than most A-Class wizards could register with their eyes. Then, they rushed forward to exchange blows once again.

Meanwhile, most of the members of the guild were gathered to watch the fight. As for the reason behind this fight... There was none. Shortly after Alfonzo and his ladies arrived at the guild hall, Natsu charged towards Alfonzo and challenged him to a fight, as he was prone to doing.

As for the rest of the evening at the banquet celebrating another successful Grand Magic Games, after Gajeel's proposal and Levy's acceptance, the evening reached its peak. The wizards made merry, nobles and other important figures sought out the guild masters to make deals about rather important quests, and the guild master's approached each other to either foster relationships or make new ones.

Then, after the banquet ended, everyone returned to their lodgings. However, unlike the other guilds at the banquet, Fairy Tail did not spend the night in Crocus. Instead, they boarded the two airships parked on the hotel's roof, the Blackbird and the Fairy's Tail, and headed back to Magnolia.

The next day, most of the guild returned to their usual duties, as the highly destructive wizards of Fairy Tail were all feeling restless after not being able to destroy any--- *Cough* Complete any quests for more than a week. Meanwhile, the members of Team Fairy Tail were told to take a week or so off. After their display of dominance, that was the least that Ur thought they deserved.

And the five members of the team took Ur up on the offer. So, the five took the ninth off to rest. Then, they came back to the guild to continue their training with their guild mates. And when they did, that was when Natsu approached Alfonzo with a challenge. And Alfonzo agreed, leading to the aforementioned exchange of blows.

"[Fire Dragon's Talon]." Natsu chanted as he swept a flaming roundhouse kick at Alfonzo's head.

In response, Alfonzo raised his left hand, pressing his palm on the inside of Natsu's right leg, just above where the flames reached, and pressed upwards, trying to disrupt Natsu's balance. However, Natsu's instincts and fighting experience led to him making a quick decision to avoid just that.

As his balance started to destabilize, Natsu expelled flames from his planted left foot, causing him to shoot straight up into the air. Then, just before his head reached the ceiling of the training room, he stopped the propulsion while raising his hands to his mouth in a trumpet shape.

"[Fire Dragon's Roar]." Natsu chanted before exhaling a torrential stream of flames.

"Damn, his flames are even hotter than the last time we fought." Alfonzo muttered as he brought his right hand near his waist. An instant later, a ball of violently spinning magic power began to form on his upturned palm. "[Rasengan]."

Then, as soon as the spell was formed in his hand, Alfonzo thrust it towards the incoming torrent of flames. And thanks to the force of Alfonzo's spinning magic power, when the [Rasengan] made contact with Natsu's [Fire Dragon's Roar], the flames were sent flying in all directions. Yet, none of them were able to get close to Alfonzo.

"You can actually use the [Rasengan] like that?" Naruto, who was among the crowd of spectators, asked with his eyes open wide. He then turned to Jiraiya, who was standing nearby and continued. "[hey, Pervy Sage, how come you never told me about this?]"

Unfortunately, Jiraiya could not answer Naruto's question. As the teacher of the one who created the [Rasengan], Naruto's father, Minato Namikaze, Jiraiya could also use the [Rasengan]. However, as Minato had created it based on the Tail Beasts' ultimate attack, the [Tailed Beast Bomb], both he and Jiraiya had only considered using it offensively. But Alfonzo's use of the technique had opened Jiraiya's eyes just now.

"If only Minato had been alive to see this." Jiraiya muttered. "I'm sure he would have been inspired to make so many more techniques with incredibly long names that took advantage of the [Rasengan's] defensive nature."

As he reached that point, a lonely, yet nostalgic smile spread across Jiraiya's face. And when Naruto saw that smile, he felt a bit sad, as well. Luckily, Naruto was a bit of an idiot. It was also suspected that he had ADHD. So, he did not stay down for long. Instead, he turned to Sasuke with his eyes shining.

"Hey, Sasuke, help me train a technique like that later, okay?" Naruto asked excitedly.

"Hmph! Even if you find a way to block flames, you'll still never be able to beat me.

"What was that?" Naruto asked with a snarl. "Why don't we test that out later."

"Any time, Loser." Sasuke shot back.

"Sasuke~~~~~!" Naruto shouted.

Naruto~~~~~!" Sasuke shouted back.

"*Sigh* They're at it again." Saeko said while shaking her head. She then turned to Sun with a smile.
"But I can understand how they feel. Sun, after seeing you fight in the Grand Magic Games, I've been wanting to spar with you, as well."

"Sure." Sun replied cheerfully. "I like fighting your [Flying Heaven's Sword-Style]. You're so fast. It makes me have to anticipate further and further ahead every time we spar."

Several other challenges were issued while Alfonzo and Natsu continued to exchange blows. Even so, no one ever took their eyes off the fight for long.

Bang! *Bang!* *Smack!* *Thud!* *Bang!*

The sounds of blocks, parries, and attacks landing echoed through the training room as Alfonzo and Natsu engaged in close quarters combat for the next half a minute, or so. However, as Natsu blocked Alfonzo's last kick, he was sent sliding back across the floor. Yet, Natsu quickly took advantage of the created distance as he was quickly engulfed in flames.

"[Dragon Slayer Secret Art: Hidden Fire Form – Crimson Lotus: Phoenix Blade]." Natsu chanted before dashing forward at high speed.

"Why the hell is a Dragon Slayer spell named after a phoenix?" Alfonzo asked as he readied himself to defend.

Bang!

Without receiving a response to what he thought was a completely logical question, Alfonzo crossed his arms to block a sharp uppercut with enough force to lift him off the ground and send him flying towards the ceiling.

Not wasting any time, Natsu followed Alfonzo into the air, jumping several times faster than Alfonzo's ascent. Within the blink of an eye, Natsu closed in on Alfonzo, looking to land a flame charged headbutt on the middle of Alfonzo's chest.

"Bad move, Natsu." Alfonzo said as he put his hands out in front of him while still rising.
"[Electromagnetism Magic: Reflection Barrier]."

In the next instant, using visible light to draw all the necessary sigils between himself and Natsu, Alfonzo brought a light screen into existence. And when Natsu saw it, his eyes widened as he tried to cancel his momentum by expelling flames from his shoulders. Unfortunately, he was too close to the barrier and moving too fast to make any real difference.

Boom!

Boom!

An instant later, Natsu slammed head first into the barrier. Then, he was sent falling back towards the training room's floor with force equal to the moment of impact. Meaning, just as quickly as he had risen into the air, he was slammed into the floor before bouncing away from his landing point.

By the time Alfonzo landed on the ground and shook off the numbness in his arms from Natsu's uppercut, Natsu was lying on his back with his eyes spinning in their sockets after his body took two such powerful impacts.

"Well, I guess that's it." Alfonzo said as he walked over to Natsu. "Aren't you tired of getting your ass kicked yet, Natsu?"

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Natsu asked in a groggy tone. "This just adds to our long list of matches that have ended in a draw. We'll fight again later."

"*Sigh* And this must be why he's such a nightmare to fight on a quest." Alfonzo said as he reached down, picked up Natsu, and threw him over his shoulder. "He just doesn't give up."

"And that's exactly how a Fairy Tail wizard should be." Ur said as she approached from the crowd of spectators. "Anyway, give Natsu to Lisanna or Erza, or someone... I really don't care who at this point. I need to talk to you in my office."

"*Sigh* I don't like the sound of this." Alfonzo said with his eyes narrowed. "It sounds an awful lot like you're gonna send me somewhere to work again."

Instead of responding, Ur only turned around and left the training room, basically solidifying Alfonzo's suspicion in his head. Still, he did as Ur said and handed Natsu off to Lisanna so she could take him to the infirmary to make sure that the last hit to his head did not make Natsu's brain damage even worse.

Not long later, Alfonzo stepped out of the elevator into Ur's office. When he arrived, he was surprised to see that Ur was not alone. Instead, there were two women, and a middle-aged man seated on the couches in front of her desk. While a familiar young man stood behind the couch where one of the women and the middle-aged man sat.

The first of those Alfonzo was not expecting to see when he arrived was someone he was intimately familiar with, Irene, one of his lovers. Sitting across from Irene were the other woman and the middle-aged man. Behind them was someone that Alfonzo had seen recently, as well. And that was Squall Leonhart, the leader of Team Final Fantasy in the Grand Magic Games.

Seated on the couch, the other woman, a middle-aged woman who did not look a day over thirty, exuded both beauty and sophistication with her long, straight, black hair, brilliant green eyes, and bright red lipstick, her flawless pale skin looked even more eye catching. Add to that the simple, yet elegant, ankle-

length black dress and short-sleeved, waist length summer jacket she wore over top of it, and it would be no surprise that if someone told Alfonzo that she often drew all the eyes in a room.

Next to the beautiful woman was a middle-aged man with neatly cut brown hair, blue eyes, and a strong jaw line wearing a pair of glasses, a burgundy vest over a long-sleeved, white collared shirt with a green tie, a brown pair of slacks, and a black pair of leather shoes.

"Ah! You're finally here." Ur said after seeing Alfonzo step off the elevator. "Allow me to introduce you to the master of the Final Fantasy guild and her husband, Edea and Cid Kramer. As for their ace, I believe you've already met Squall Leonhart."

As soon as Ur started addressing Alfonzo, both the beautiful woman and the middle-aged man, Edea and Cid, stood up. Edea then stepped forward and extended a hand for a handshake.

Naturally, Alfonzo returned the gesture, politely taking Edea's hand before releasing it. He then shook Cid's hand more firmly before also releasing it. After that, he nodded at Squall, who stayed stationary as though he were a guard or a soldier rather than a guild wizard.

"It's nice to meet you." Alfonzo said after both handshakes. He then glanced at Irene before he continued. "I'm Fairy Tail's ace, Alfonzo Marcus."

Naturally, the reason for Alfonzo's glance in Irene's direction was because he felt uncomfortable calling himself Fairy Tail's ace when there was clearly a stronger Fairy Tail wizard sitting in the same room. But since Irene did not want to draw attention to herself, he accepted the title, even if it was not accurate.

"Now that we're all acquainted, we have some business to discuss." Ur said. She then waited until everyone was seated, with Edea and Cid returning to the couch they stood up from and Alfonzo taking a seat next to Irene. "There are two requests for you, Alfonzo. Which do you want to hear first?"

"*Sigh* I knew it." Alfonzo muttered under his breath, making Ur and Irene smile, with Irene's being an amused smile and Ur's being rather wry. "You never call me unless you have work for me. *Sigh* What would Mom think if she knew how you treated me, Aunt Ur?"

Immediately, Ur's wry smile turned into an expression of annoyance while she gritted her teeth and tried not to cast her [Ice Fist] spell on the top of Alfonzo's head... Not in front of the guests, anyway.

Meanwhile, Edea and Cid were surprised to hear that Alfonzo and Ur were actually related. But before they could say anything, Ur noticed and decided to clear up any misunderstandings.

"Before you get the wrong Idea, we're not related by blood." Ur said. "His mother, Bianca Rollen was one of my best friends when she was still alive. So, he and his first wife, Elicia, Orlando Taylor's daughter, are like family. Though, I'd prefer if they did not call me Aunt."

"I see." Edea replied. "So, you're the Mage Killer's son. Well, that would certainly explain why you're so strong."

"Let me stop you right there." Alfonzo said with a raised hand. "I love my mom, and I'm glad she was there as long as she was. She and Uncle Orlando even sacrificed themselves to make sure that Lici and I could live. But I'd appreciate it if you didn't discount the fact that we've worked our asses off since the day Gramps picked us up from that orphanage in Hargeon."

Hearing how strongly Alfonzo retorted, Edea and Cid were slightly taken aback. Squall, on the other hand, nodded his head in agreement. Because like Alfonzo, his father was also a rather famous and powerful wizard in the past. Though, he was not on the same level as Bianca. Either way, simply accrediting his success to his heritage felt like Edea was staying that all his effort was meaningless.

Silence settled over the room after that. Though, Alfonzo was not angered by Edea's comment, and there were no negative emotions in his retort, only those of pride in his hard work, the silence still became awkward rather quickly.

"Anyway, why don't I start by telling you about Final Fantasy's request." Ur said, trying to break the awkward atmosphere. "Final Fantasy is extending a formal request to have all their wizards outfitted with new equipment."

"Huh? Not training chambers?" Alfonzo asked in a dumbfounded tone. "But didn't I already make deals with Final Fantasy's members when we had that party in Crocus?"

"That's right." Cid replied while adjusting his glasses. "However, before the Games started this year, Edea and I had decided, without letting our wizards know, of course, that if the team led by Squall managed to qualify for the main event on their first attempt, we would sponsor all their equipment upgrades. Yet, without knowing that, they all placed orders with you back then."

"So, we would like you to bill all of their orders to us." Edea continued. "The guild itself will become the client for one large order rather than many small individual orders."

"Oh, I get it now." Alfonzo replied with a nod. He then glanced at Ur with a pout. "Our guild never pays for our equipment upgrades. *Sigh* I guess that's just the difference between guilds, huh? *Sigh* I really have to wonder just what our master has been spending all that prize money on."

Once again, Ur found herself gritting her teeth while Irene only smiled at Alfonzo's playfulness. Apparently, Alfonzo was in a good mood. Though, she reckoned that would change after she relayed Sabertooth's request.

However, it would change even sooner than Irene expected. And this time, Alfonzo would be the one gritting his teeth while Ur smiled in amusement.

"Then, I assume we have a deal?" Cid asked. He then continued after receiving a nod from Alfonzo. "But now I'm curious to know about these training chambers you mentioned. Master Ur never said anything about those to us. And I must admit, I'm quite intrigued."

Gritting his teeth in frustration, Alfonzo immediately snapped his head in Ur's direction after hearing Cid's intrigued words. He had just fallen into Ur's trap. By intentionally not telling Edea and Cid about the training chambers, it would surprise Alfonzo when they asked for something else. And in that surprise, he asked about them himself, effectively bringing more work for himself.

Either way, Alfonzo managed to put that conversation off until another day, since he still had to hear another request that was brought by Irene from Sabertooth. And he already had an idea of what that request would be. So, when Irene mentioned that Sabertooth wanted to place an order for the aforementioned training chambers, he managed to keep his cool.

In the end, it was decided that Alfonzo would work on the equipment order first. By his estimates, he would probably be finished by the Harvest Festival, which was a little more than three months away. There were nearly a hundred sets of equipment he would have to make, after all.

Then, after the Harvest Festival, Alfonzo would travel to Sabertooth's guild hall to install the training chambers they ordered. Hopefully, he would be done with those before the S-Class Promotion Exam. Yet, even if he was not, he would take a break for the exam before coming back to finish the job.

Chapter 715: Gildarts' Intervention; Part 1

"This just adds to the list of things I hate about taking quests in this country." Gildarts grumbled while walking through the desert of the Sandy Country, Desierto. "First, they don't use Jewels. So, I have to exchange money. Then, there are no trains between cities. So, I have to walk everywhere because the camels won't come anywhere near me. And finally, it's so damn hot. *Sigh* At least I can take the train back to Fiore. But why are the tickets so expensive every time I have to take the train?"

Currently, Gildarts was returning after completing his 10 Years Quest to slay a monster that had been killing merchants and destroying caravans that traveled from Desierto's capital city, Ardeshir to the several towns in the area that housed the Village Hidden in the Sand.

However, when Gildarts arrived at the reported location to fight the reported monster, he quickly found that it was no monster. Instead, it was one of the Books of Zeref, an Etherious, much like the Deliora he fought back when he rescued Ur, Ultear, Gray, and Lyon all those years ago.

"At least this thing wasn't going around killing random things and people." Gildarts muttered as he looked over his shoulder at the giant head he was dragging along with him. "But seriously, why did the Black Wizard have to make all his creations so big? Ugh! Even worse, why did this thing pick a place filled with sand to cause trouble? Damn it! I'm gonna find sand all over the place for the next year. I hate the desert."

Boom~~~~~!

Before Gildarts could complain any further, the sound of an explosion interrupted him. And when he turned his head in the direction of the sound, Gildarts saw a cloud of sand shooting up into the air in the shape of a mushroom.

"Well, that doesn't look too good." Gildarts muttered. "We're only a few miles away from Ardeshir. If whatever caused such an explosion were to make its way to the city, it could cause a lot of casualties. *Sigh* Being a defender of justice is such a tiresome and thankless job."

With that, Gildarts pulled on the hair of the dead Etherious he was dragging behind him. Then, he slung the head onto his shoulder before circulating his magic power through his body. A moment later, Gildarts vanished from where he stood, the only evidence of his presence a cloud of sand that followed him into the distance.

Meanwhile, near the point of explosion, two men, one with slicked-back silver hair and purple eyes filled with fanaticism while carrying a large scythe with three red blades over his shoulder and one with a grey hood that covered his hair and a half mask that covered his mouth only revealing his tanned-skin and strange eyes with green irises, red sclerae, and no pupils, wearing matching black robes with red cloud patterns standing off against a strange creature cloaked in dark red, ominous magic power with seven long tails waving menacingly behind it.

"Just give up." The tan-skinned man said calmly. "You're making this more trouble than it's worth. And I hate doing work that doesn't match the value."

"I'd rather just sacrifice her to Jashin right now." The silver-haired man said, sounding disappointed that he could not do what he wanted. "But she'll be sacrificed soon enough, I guess. But if she keeps resisting, I don't know if I'll be able to hold back."

"Shut up, you idiot." The tan-skinned man shot back. "If you did that, all the resources we used for this operation would be wasted. And if that happens, I'll definitely kill you."

"Oh yeah?" The silver-haired man asked in a challenging tone. "You know, now that I think about it, Jashin would love your sacrifice, too. Maybe I should start there?"

Just as the silver-haired man and the tan-skinned man, Hidan and Kakuzu of Akatsuki, looked as if they would come to blows, the creature turned its head in a certain direction and tensed, readying itself for a possible incoming enemy.

Seeing the creature's movements, Hidan and Kakuzu stopped their bickering and turned to look in the same direction. At the same time, they went on alert once again, just in case the creature tried to escape.

It seemed the latter's preparation was unnecessary, however. Because a moment later, the trio could see a cloud of sand appeared in the horizon. And from what the three could tell, whatever was causing it was getting closer. And it did not take long before the sand cloud, or rather, what caused it to arrive near the three.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?" A rugged male voice asked from inside of the sand cloud. His voice then continued after what seemed to be the head of a beast was sent flying from the cloud. "If I didn't know any better, I would think there was a monster attacking two travelers out here in the desert. But those cloaks you two are wearing tell a different story. You two are from Akatsuki, right?"

As the voice spoke, the sand cloud settled, eventually revealing the speaker, a tall, muscular man with slicked back orange hair, a stubby beard, and dark green eyes. Also, he only wore a pair of baggy pants and a tattered cloak that hid an Automail left arm and leg.

"Who the hell are you?" Hidan asked. A moment later, he shook his head with an unhinged smile on his face. "No, it doesn't matter. He'll just be another sacrifice to Lord Jashin."

"That's Gildarts Clive." Kakuzu said in a grim tone. "Fairy Tail's former ace. He's quite the high bounty. A lot of towns and cities seem like they want him gone. More than likely it's because of all the destruction he brings wherever he goes."

"Really?" Gildarts asked while scratching his head. "I didn't think it was that bad."

"Oh, but it is." Kakuzu replied. "You have the highest bounty of any legal wizard on the continent."

"Damn... That's kinda badass." Gildarts said with a grin. "I bet the Kid will flip when he hears that."

After saying that, Gildarts turned towards the seven-tailed creature.

"And if those two are from Akatsuki, that must make you one of those Jinchuriki that these guys are trying to kidnap, right?" Gildarts asked. "Well then, I guess I'll have to step in to stop that. Can't have them completing their goals, after all."

"You're going to... help me?" The seven-tailed creature asked in a bestial tone.

"Yeah, helping those in need is kinda what Fairy Tail wizards do." Gildarts replied with a shrug.

Hearing that, the seven-tailed creature seemed to relax. Then, the dark red magic power covering its body began to thin out. And as it did, it was clear to see that the seven-tailed creature was not some kind of monster. Instead, it was a young woman with tan skin, short, layered mint green hair, and orange eyes wearing a hair clip that matched the color of her eyes, a white and red crop top, white skirt, white detached sleeves, and white shinobi sandals.

As soon as the dark red magic power was completely dispersed, it was clear that the young woman was injured, as her clothing was torn in various places. She was also covered in bruises, cuts, and blood.

"Seriously, you two would beat up a little girl this bad?" Gildarts asked while shaking his head at Kakuzu and Hidan. "Well, whatever. You won't be hurting anyone ever again when I'm done with you."

"I think you overestimate yourself, Gildarts Clive." Kakuzu said grimly. "Your bounty will be mine."

"And your soul shall be sacrificed to Lord Jashin!" Hidan shouted as he dashed towards Gildarts with the strange scythe he carried ready to strike.

"*Sigh* The bad guys always act like this." Gildarts said as he reeled his right fist back. "Fine. Then, I'll just deal with you like I do all the others. "

By the time Gildarts finished speaking, Hidan had reached the optimal distance to use his scythe. Yet, Gildarts reacted calmly, casually dodging Hidan's seemingly wild, yet very precise swings, which had a clear purpose.

'He's not trying to inflict any serious injuries with these swings.' Gildarts noticed while continuing to dodge. 'If I had to guess, even the smallest injury would be enough for him. Hmm... Is there poison on the blade? I guess I don't really wanna find out. Something tells me there's more to it than that, though.'

Swoosh! *Swoosh!* *Swoosh!*

"Hmm... he's better than I thought." Kakuzu muttered while watching Hidan attack Gildarts. "Still, he's not as impressive as I imagined. Especially with a bounty like that. No matter. As long as I get the money for bringing in his head, it's actually better if he's not as strong as I expected."

Reaching that point, Kakuzu turned away from the fight, refocusing on the actual target for his and Hidan's mission, the tan-skinned young woman they were fighting before Gildarts showed up.

"There's no point in struggling, Girl." Kakuzu said, drawing the young woman's attention away from the fight. "Just make this easier on both of us and come with me."

"No!" The girl replied firmly. "Giving up would mean giving up on my dream. And I definitely won't do that."

"Well said, young lady." Gildarts replied while continuing to avoid Hidan's attacks. "Never give up. If you do, you'll never know just what you could have accomplished if you kept going."

Schick!

After saying that, Gildarts drew the attention of the young woman and Kakuzu back to himself. At the same time, he stopped dodging, having understood Hidan's level of skill with his weapon of choice. He then raised a hand coated in magic power and caught the scythe with his palm. And to Gildarts' surprise, when he did so, the blade was actually able to cut through his magic power and leave a shallow wound on his hand.

"Oh, that's new." Gildarts said while looking at the blade of the scythe with curiosity. "When's the last time a weapon was able to get through my [Crash Magic]. I bet the kid would like to take a look at this thing."

"Hahahaha!" Hidan began laughing a very unhinged laughter while Gildarts was looking at the small injury on his hand. "I really must thank you, because of your actions, you've sped up Lord Jashin's sacrifice."

Looking at Hidan's wild laughter, Gildarts began to think.

'Well, it looks like the blade isn't poisoned.' Gildarts thought to himself. 'So, that's not why he seems so happy. So, the only other reason I can think of is that he wants my blood. And I can think of more than a few ways that a dark wizard could use my blood for something dangerous for me. Well, I really don't wanna deal with that. So...'

With his thoughts reaching that point, Gildarts tightened his grip around the middle blade of Hidan's three bladed scythe. Then, after exerting a good amount of strength...

"Hey! What the fuck are you doing?" Hidan shouted as the scythe was yanked out of his hand. "That was bestowed to me because of my service to Lord Jashin! How dare you defile it like so?"

... pulled the scythe right out of Hidan's hands. Gildarts then stepped back and looked at the scythe, noticing the few drops of fresh blood on the center blade.

"Is that so?" Gildarts asked as he tossed the scythe up and caught it by its shaft. "Well, I'd rather not let you have access to my blood. So, I'll be keeping this."

"Damn you!" Hidan shouted angrily as he charged forward to try and retrieve his weapon.

"You seem way too upset after just losing one weapon." Gildarts said while dodging a barrage of punches and kicks from Hidan. "I see you have that weird spike-thing under your cloak, why don't you just use that instead?"

"Silence, infidel!" Hidan shouted like an enraged cult member. "I won't make your sacrifice to Lord Jashin quick. No, you'll suffer more than anyone before you!"

Meanwhile, Kakuzu could not help sighing while rubbing the space between his eyes in exasperation. "Why do I always get partnered with idiots? I can't even kill this one. Not that I haven't tried before, though."

After saying that, Kakuzu decided he could deal with the Seven-Tails Jinchuriki later. For now, he needed to deal with Gildarts. Otherwise, the former would be much more difficult.

Swoosh!

With that decision made, Kakuzu grabbed his cloak with his right hand. Then, he flung it off in one motion. When he did, his bare arms were revealed. However, they were strange. Unlike most people, it looked like his arms were held together with sturdy black threads.

The threads holding Kakuzu's body together were produced by a Jutsu known as [Earth Grudge Fear]. With these threads, or rather tendrils, Kakuzu has completely remade his body from the inside. And by integrating the hearts of others into the tendrils, he gained a form of limited immortality. He also gained the ability to use elemental Jutsu that he did not have an affinity to, provided that the victim of his heart extraction had the affinity for it.

A moment after Kakuzu took off his cloak, two masks, that were once attached to his back, split off, supported by the tendrils. Both masks were white, one of which had red markings while the other had green markings. Then, the mouth portions of both masks opened while aiming at Gildarts and Hidan, who were engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Meanwhile, Kakuzu started performing hand signs at high speed.

"[Fire-Style: Intelligent Hard work]." Kakuzu said, naming his technique while continuing to perform hand signs after casting his first Jutsu. A moment later, he completed the second series of hand signs and named the technique. "[Wind-Style: Pressure Damage]."

When she heard Kakuzu call out his first Jutsu, the young woman snapped her head in his direction while preparing to evade. However, when she saw the masks supported by the tendrils coming out of Kakuzu's back, she opened her eyes wide in shock. Just a moment later, however, she snapped back to her senses when she realized that Kakuzu was aiming at the two fighting in the distance.

'Is he going to attack is comrade, too?' The young woman thought to herself. However, before she could sink too far into those thoughts, she forcefully shook them off. 'That's not important right now!'

"Hey! Watch out!" The young woman shouted in an attempt to warn Gildarts, who was clearly trying to help her.

Unfortunately, the young woman's warning came too late.

While she was surprised, the mask with the red markings gathered. [Fire Magic] in the open part of its mask. Then, after it was condensed sufficiently, the small fireball was shot in Gildarts' and Hidan's direction. All the while, the mask with the green markings was also condensing [Wind Magic].

Boom~~~~~!

By the time Gildarts and Hidan heard the young woman's warning and looked for what was approaching, the small fireball was already upon them. Unluckily for Hidan, Kakuzu had aimed at him, knowing that he would not evade. And there were two reasons for that.

First, Because of Hidan's abilities, he would not bother reacting to an incoming attack. So, Kakuzu knew the attack would land. Second, Kakuzu was afraid that if he had aimed for Gildarts, the former Fairy Tail ace might sense it with his instincts and get out of the way or counterattack.

And things went just as Kakuzu expected. The small fireball landed on Hidan then, it expanded into a giant firestorm that engulfed both Hidan and Gildarts.

"Kakuzu! You bastard~~~!" Hidan screamed as he was engulfed in flames. "I'll definitely sacrifice you to Lord Jashin one day!"

Then, just as Hidan's screams and curses echoed over the battlefield, the [Wind-Style Jutsu] that was forming in the other mask's mouth was fired, as well. And when it entered the flames, the firestorm expanded explosively, intensifying the flames at the same time.

"Good." Kakuzu said as he retracted the two masks. "Now I'll be able to collect Gildarts Clive's bounty. *Sigh* I'll have to put Hidan back together, too. Damn it... I'd rather that idiot died, too."

Kakuzu then turned to the young woman.

"But I'll deal with you while the fire burns out." Kakuzu said as he raised his left foot to start walking towards the young woman.

"So, you don't think that was enough to kill that guy, huh?" Gildarts' voice sounded from the conflagration. "Then, I guess that means I don't have to hold back. You see, I'm not really into killing dark wizards. I'd rather allow the Magic Council to deal with them. They don't bother me as much for all the stuff I destroy if I do, you see. And if I let them take credit for catching them, they overlook some of the stuff I destroy all together. Well then, let's make this quick. [Bring Devastation, Calamity]."

Hum~~~~~!

In the next instant, the magical pressure in the area skyrocketed as the flaming vortex was dispersed by a powerful shockwave that sent Hidan's burnt body flying. However, the source of the magical pressure, Gildarts, was nowhere to be seen because the magic power leaking casually from his body was distorting the air as it was being broken down into small cubes before reforming repeatedly. As a result, a haze was obscuring Gildarts from view.

Chapter 716: Gildarts' Intervention; Part 2

The haze surrounding Gildarts slowly thinned over the next thirty seconds. At the same time, magic power pressure in the area lowered proportionally. Then, when the haze was finally gone, Gildarts was once again revealed. However, his Automail left arm now looked different.

Instead of a simple, if not sleeker than average, silver-colored Automail arm, now, Gildarts arm had grown in size. On top of that, there were protrusions sticking out of his shoulder and around his elbow. Plus, the color had changed from silver to a dull golden color, like that of orichalcum.

That's right, after Gildarts finished nurturing his [Soul Armament Embryo] and it completed its first shift, it took on the appearance of an Automail arm. Yet, instead of having to undergo surgery to have it reattached after taking off the old one, as soon as he touched his [Soul Armament] with his Automail arm, the two arms fused.

Naturally, this freaked Gildarts all the way the fuck out when it happened. So, without thinking, he sprinted through Magnolia, destroying several houses along the way, and headed straight for Alfonzo's mansion. However, just like it usually did when Gildarts arrived unannounced, the [Reflection Barrier] sent him flying. And because it was much more powerful than it was back when Alfonzo first created it, combined with the fact that Gildarts was running at full speed due to panic, by the time Gildarts calmed down, he was able to admire the view of the town while sailing right past it at an altitude of about three hundred feet.

"Damn... I really need to practice using this more." Gildarts muttered while raising his left arm to take a good look at it. Unfortunately, I'm not allowed to unseal you in any of the training rooms at the guild hall, Calamity. And when I'm not training in the training chambers, I kinda forget."

After he finished speaking, which was strange to Kakuzu and the young woman, because it looked like he was talking to his Automail, Gildarts flinched, as if it shouted back at him. And while the mint-green-haired young woman only tilted her head, as if she was thinking about something, Kakuzu's expression turned incredibly blank.

"I've been around for over a hundred years." Kakuzu muttered. "And I've taken a few bounties on Fairy Tail wizards in the past. And I knew they were all weird. But he's talking to his damn arm. I think this guy takes the cake. It will probably be a good thing if I kill him."

'But where did all that power come from?' Kakuzu asked himself. 'Was he holding back the whole time he was fighting that moron? Never mind, of course he was. Without his enemy's blood to use in his [Death Controlling Possessed Blood Curse], Hidan is only a little better than your average Jonin.'

"I think I just heard something interesting." Gildarts said as he shifted his gaze over to Kakuzu. He then continued with his voice taking on a more grave tone. "You said you've killed a few of my seniors in the past, didn't you? I think we need to sit down and talk about that."

"There's nothing for us to talk about." Kakuzu replied coldly. "You'll be joining them in the afterlife soon enough."

"Wrong answer." Gildarts said as he lowered his stance and raised his left arm into a position to throw a punch.

At the same time, the tips of the protrusions on Gildarts' elbow began to light up with the light of his magic power. Meanwhile, the protrusions on his shoulder turned to face the same direction as the ones on his elbow before lighting up, as well.

"[Fissure]." Gildarts said quietly in an intense tone.

Boom!

In the next instant, magic power shot out of the glowing tips of the protrusions on Gildarts' arm. Then, he shot forward even faster than before when his movements were kicking up sand as he approached. At the same time, the ground along Gildarts path fissured behind him.

"What the...?" Kakuzu exclaimed when he saw how fast Gildarts was moving. At the same time, he started flying through hand signs. "[Earth-Style: Rock Trail], [Fire-Style: Intelligent Hard Work], [Wind-Style: Pressure Damage], [Lightning-Style: False Darkness], [Water-Style: Water Formation Wall]."

At a speed that even surpassed his peak, Kakuzu formed hand signs at a blinding speed. Managing to perform five Jutsu before Gildarts could cross half the distance. At the same time, two more masks were detached from his back, supported by the tendrils of the [Earth Grudge Fear]. Then, each mask opened its mouth before spewing magic power of its element. Meanwhile, Kakuzu dropped to one knee and slammed his palms on the ground.

In the next instant, the fire mask once again fired a small fireball towards Gildarts while the wind mask began condensing [Wind Magic] in its mouth. Meanwhile, like the fire mask both the lightning mask and the water mask also spat magic power of their element. However, while the lightning mask fired a spear of [Lightning Magic] that was condensed into a laser, the water mask spat a blob of water to the ground that circled around Kakuzu before rising up to create a [Water Barrier].

On top of that, with Kakuzu's hands slamming into the ground, the sand, in a straight line between himself and Gildarts, hardened into stones that rose up and tried to crush Gildarts.

"Impressive casting speed." Gildarts said without any fluctuation in his expression. "Still, it's useless. [Crash Magic: Crushing Evil, Spreading the Truth: Empyrean]."

With his chant, Gildarts slightly adjusted the speed of his approach. And with that slight adjustment, the four offensive Jutsu Kakuzu cast, which would have hit Gildarts from different angles thanks to their relative speeds, ended up in a straight line after a moment. Then, Gildarts sped up to his max speed as he threw his fist forward.

Swoosh! *Swoosh!* *Swoosh!* *Swoosh!*

In the next instant, Gildarts' fist, coated in his [Crash Magic], dispersed the lightning spear, fireball, wind sphere, and protruding rocks into motes of magic power one after the other. A moment later, that same fist slammed into Kakuzu's [Water Barrier], dispersing it as well.

"This is for those Fairy Tail wizards you killed over the years." Gildarts said just before his fist slammed into Kakuzu's chest.

"Damn it!" Kakuzu shouted as more tendrils extended from his body and wrapped around him defensively.

Boom!

Yet, as soon as Gildarts' [Crash Magic] came in contact with those tendrils, they broke down into dust. Then, Gildarts' fist finally struck Kakuzu. When it did, the old shinobi was sent flying into the distance, the mask covering the bottom half of his face turning red from the blood he coughed up.

On top of that, as Kakuzu disappeared over the horizon, Gildarts could see the four strange masks that were connected to him via those tendrils crumbling away, a well.

"Ahahahahaha!" At the same time, Hidan started to laugh uproariously. "Look at him go! Ha! Who's the idiot now, Kakuzu? Hahaha!"

"*Sigh* He used so many different kinds of magic all at once... I can see why he would have been able to take out wizards in the past." Gildarts said as he turned towards the laughing maniac, who should, by all accounts, be dead already. "The real question is... What should I do with you?"

Hearing Gildarts' question, Hidan's laughter stopped. Then, he, with his entire body burned and bleeding, glared at Gildarts angrily.

"It doesn't matter what you do." Hidan said wrathfully. "Even if you crush me to dust, cut my head off, or pierce my heart, you can't kill me. And because I can't die, I will, sooner or later, sacrifice you to Lord Jashin. But because you pissed me off, it won't be just you that I sacrifice. No! I'll sacrifice everyone you hold dear. And I'll make you watch as their lives end in the most pain-filled way that I can."

"Well, for your sake I hope we can find a way to get rid of you." Gildarts said after staring into Hidan's eyes for a few moments. He then shook his head, seemingly pitying Hidan for thinking of doing

something exceedingly stupid. "Because if you ever try to hurt my little girl, the Kid's gonna make you regret that immortality of yours."

In response to Gildarts' warning, Hidan simply continued to laugh maniacally. Seeing that, Gildarts only shook his head once again. Then, he walked over to Hidan's body and did something that he would never do in most situations. Or rather, he would never have to. He straightened the fingers on his left hand into a spear hand. Then, he...

Swish! *Splatter!*

... swung his left arm, his hand passing right through Hidan's neck, and sending his head rolling away as the blood gushed from the stump. A moment later, he placed his hand on Hidan's chest and flowed his [Crash Magic] into the headless body, atomizing it in the process. He then stood up straight and released Calamity's partially unsealed state.

"Ow~~~!" Hidan screamed in pain. "Damn it! I'm really, really, really, gonna make it hurt when I eventually sacrifice you. Holy fucking shit! This really fucking hurts!"

Seeing the talking head cursing and complaining about how much pain it was in, Gildarts could only stare blankly for a while. A moment later, he shook his head. Then, he finally turned to the tan-skinned young woman he just rescued from the two members of Akatsuki.

"So, you alright, little lady?" Gildarts asked as he took a step forward before picking up Hidan's head by his hair. "Got any injuries?"

Unfortunately, the young woman was too dumbfounded at the sight of a talking, decapitated head to answer right away. Yet, she finally snapped out of her daze when Gildarts started walking towards the other, much larger, head he had discarded before the fight began.

"Uh... Yes... I'm fine." The tan-skinned woman said in an uncertain tone. Yet, only a moment later, a smile spread over her face as she skipped over to Gildarts and started inspecting the large beasts' head. "Hey! Hey! What's that? Did you hunt it? Where's the rest of the body? Do you think it would taste good?"

Slightly taken aback by the girl's change in demeanor, Gildarts could only smile wryly when she started bombarding him with questions.

"Well, this is the head of the monster I was tasked with taking down on my quest." Gildarts said. "As for the rest of the body, I don't know what it would taste like. But I left it behind. It was too big to bring back."

"Oh, I see." The young woman said while nodding in understanding. "By the way, they said your name was Gildarts Clive, right? Mind if I call you Gil? Okay, Gil. So, are you from Desierto? If so, do you know how to get to Stella? I need to go home. I'm sure Shibuki is waiting for me."

Reaching that point, the young woman's mood dipped once again.

"Unfortunately, the two shinobi who were sent to protect me died when those guys attacked." The young woman said. "And they're the ones who knew the way home. This is my first time out of my village, you see."

"Slow down, young lady." Gildarts said, wanting to place a hand on the young woman's shoulder. Unfortunately, his hands were full with the two heads he was holding. "Before we go any further, why don't you start with a name?"

Gasping in surprise, the young woman looked as if she just remembered that part.

"Right! How could I forget?" The young woman said. "I can't make a hundred friends like Shibuki said if I don't introduce myself, can I?"

The young woman then put on a more serious face, though, the smile she had been wearing for most of the time since the fight ended, was still present.

"My name is Fū. It's nice to meet you, Gil." The tan-skinned woman, Fū, said cheerfully. "Would you be my friend?"

Smiling in response, Gildarts did not know how to react to Fū's friend request. He was forty-four years old this year and this girl seemed to be even younger than Cana. Even so, he did not reject her.

"Sure." Gildarts replied casually. "As for your other question, yes, I know how to get to Stella. But I don't know if it would be a good idea to send you back right now."

"Huh? Why not?" Fū asked while tilting her head in a confused manner.

"Because of these guys." Gildarts replied while lifting Hidan's head.

"Damn it! If you're gonna carry me around like this, at least find a better way to do it you asshole!" Hidan shouted. "Do you have any idea how much it hurts to be hanging from your hair?"

"There are at least six more of them." Gildarts continued while ignoring Hidan. "And they're goal is to hunt down all the Jin... Him... Jin-something like you."

"It's Jinchuriki." Fū corrected happily. A moment later, however, she put on a troubled expression. "But if I don't go back right away, Shibuki will be worried."

"Hmm... Well, we don't want your friends to be worried about you, do we?" Gildarts asked rhetorically while lowering his head to think. However, when he did, he did not notice the hint of sadness in Fū's expression when he mentioned her friends. Unaware of that, he continued. "How about this? Why don't you come back with me to Fiore. I'll protect you if any more of those guys show up. And when we get there, we can send a message to this Shibuki you've been talking about. Then, we can set up a time and place for you two to reunite."

"Really? That sounds like fun." Fū replied, snapping out of her momentary sadness before Gildarts could notice it. "Will there be people to make friends with in Fiore?"

"Of course, there will." Gildarts replied as he turned to start walking towards Ardeshir. "In fact, I've got a whole guild full of people who wouldn't mind being friends with you."

"Great! Then what are we waiting for?" Fū asked energetically. "Let's go!"

And with that, the two went on their way. However, they were unaware of the figure that climbed out of the sand nearly thirteen miles away from where the battle took place.

"Damn it..." Kakuzu grumbled as he pulled himself out of a sand pit that was created when he landed after Gildarts' punch. He then continued while ripping off his blood-soaked half mask. "In just one attack, he destroyed my fire, wind, lightning, and water hearts. Now I'm going to have to find replacements. This is such a pain. *Sigh* I'll have to report that idiot got captured, too. It's starting to look like staying with the Akatsuki isn't worth the trouble anymore. But I'm sure they won't take my betrayal well. Well, when I find a good opportunity to get out, I'm leaving. But for now, let's head to the hideout and report what happened."

Like that, Kakuzu traveled in a direction different from Gildarts to reach the closest Akatsuki hideout. Meanwhile, other than his hood, mask, and cloak that were destroyed, no one would even be able to tell he had been injured if they were to see him now. Though, there were a few more visible tendrils holding his body together.

Chapter 717: Alfonzo's Reaction

"*Sigh* I'm almost done." Alfonzo said as he stretched his arms over his head. "Damn my work ethic. I could have put this shit off until after our trip to Balsam Village. But no~~~~, I had to get all the designs done before that. And now, I've been pulling all-nighters ever since I met with Edea and Cid."

A few days have passed since the Final Fantasy guild master, her husband, and the guild's ace came to Magnolia to make a request from Alfonzo. Then, after Alfonzo took the job from them, Irene dropped the fact that Minerva, the acting guild master of Sabertooth, had formed an alliance with Ur at the Grand Magic Games' Celebration Banquet. So, they were requesting a set of training chambers for their guild hall.

Neither job would be too daunting with Alfonzo's current capabilities. However, the timelines they had in mind for the jobs were the issue.

So, to get as much time out of the little four day, three night, vacation to Balsam Village he had planned with Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish, Alfonzo decided to get the designs for the weapons out of the way before he left. Unfortunately, that meant that he spent most of his time after the meeting in his workshop drawing schematics for weapons.

"Well, at least I have [Archive Magic] to make everything easier, though." Alfonzo muttered. "It made remembering everything I could about their ultimate weapons from the games easier, too. Now, Squall can have the Lion Heart, Aerith can have the Princess' Guard, and Vivi can have the Mace of Zeus. It's just a matter of making them. That can wait until we get back, though."

{BGM: "Baby Got Back" – Sir Mix-a-Lot}

Before Alfonzo could start thinking about the production process for all the weapons and armor he would have to make, his iPhone began to play his ringtone. So, Alfonzo reached out for the device, which was laying on his workbench, and looked at the Caller ID.

"Ugh! What the fuck does Ur want now?" Alfonzo asked in a grumpy tone. "I swear, if she tells me she's got more work for me, I'm gonna give her a piece of my mind."

With that said, Alfonzo clicked the accept button and put the iPhone to his ear.

"Hey, Ur, what's up?" Alfonzo asked casually.

'Yeah, I can talk tough.' Alfonzo thought to himself as his grumpy tone all but disappeared when he answered the call. 'I really don't wanna deal with another townwide temperature drop if I make her mad. The kids might get sick.'

{"I just got a call from Gildarts."} Ur said in a solemn tone. {"Apparently, he ran across two members of Akatsuki on his way back from his quest."}

"Which ones?" Alfonzo asked, his tone turning solemn, as well. "Some of them are seriously a problem if you don't know what to expect."

{"He said their names were Hidan and Kakuzu."} Ur replied.

"Then it's good that he's still alive." Alfonzo replied in a deadly serious tone. "I've heard about that guy, Hidan, if he gets a hold of your blood, it's pretty much a death sentence."

When Ur heard that, she took an audible breath that Alfonzo heard through the phone call. Yet, it did not take long for her to calm down.

{"He said he felt something was off with the guy when he fought him."} Ur replied. {"Luckily, he was able to defeat him... both of them with little difficulty. He did use Calamity, though."}

"Damn... I kinda wish I could have seen that." Alfonzo said, sounding a bit more excited than he should. "But it's too dangerous to let him use his partial release near a populated area. He still doesn't have the best control. And he can't even use the technique we've been using for control, his [Crash Magic] just destroys the damn spikes."

{"Right."} Ur said, sounding a little exasperated at Alfonzo losing focus on the topic at hand. {"Anyway, he said he probably killed the one called Kakuzu."}

Ur then took a deep breath before she continued.

{"As for the one called Hidan, he's got his head tied to his belt."} Ur continued, sounding a bit disgusted. {"He had to gag it, though. According to Gildarts, it wouldn't shut up."}

'Sounds about right.' Alfonzo said to himself. 'Hidan is truly immortal. Though, I'm curious to know how he got his immortality in this world. Something tells me Ankhseram wouldn't be too happy about that. I wonder if he has a curse like Mavis did. Damn... If I had another Philosopher's Stone, I would ask Ed, Al, or Izumi to see if they could trade the souls inside for Hidan's immortality. Then, we'd be able to get rid of that psycho cultist forever.'

"Well, I guess there isn't much more he could do than that." Alfonzo said after thinking for a moment. "I mean, even I don't know how he got his immortality. So, why did he get attacked? Were they after the astronomically high bounty that I'm sure someone who's destroyed so many people's shit must have?"

{"That was just a side benefit for them, apparently."} Ur replied while it sounded like she was shaking her head. {"It was because he was poking his nose into something that wasn't his business. But he did the right thing this time."}

Ur then went on to explain Gildarts' encounter with Kakuzu, Hidan, and Fū. She then explained that he was bringing Fū back to Magnolia because he was afraid that Akatsuki would just send another team to abduct her after they realized Kakuzu and Hidan had failed.

"Wait... Gildarts did not see Kakuzu's body?" Alfonzo asked after Ur finished her retelling of Gildarts' story.

{"No, after hitting him the way he did, he was sure that Kakuzu couldn't have survived."} Ur replied.
{"Why, do you think he could have survived?"}

"*Sigh* I told him to make sure that he saw the body when dealing with any of the members of Akatsuki." Alfonzo said. "Hell, I told the whole guild."

{"But he took a fully powered [Empyrean]."} Ur said in a skeptical tone.

"*Sigh* Ur, I don't expect Gildarts to remember the details about the members of Akatsuki." Alfonzo said in an exasperated tone. "But I know you remember what I told you about Kakuzu, right?"}

{"Of course."} Ur replied confidently. {"He has five hearts. Each of them let him use a different [Ninjutsu] element. Also, you have to destroy all... five... hearts... to kill him... Ah, shit."}

"Exactly, you have to see his dead body to know if he's dead or not." Alfonzo said. "And although it's easy to see if his four extra hearts die based on if the masks on his back break or not, the one in his body, HIS... At least I think it's his. Anyway, the one inside his body needs to be checked up close."

{"So, you think he got away, huh?"} Ur asked, her tone turning solemn once again.

"I hope not." Alfonzo replied. "But unless Gildarts knows where he landed, we have no way of knowing. But if he did survive, he's probably going to be reporting what happened to the rest of the Akatsuki real soon."

{"*Sigh* I'll let the guild know to be ready for retaliation."} Ur said in a tired tone.

"Do you want us to put off our vacation?" Alfonzo asked seriously. "The guild's safety is more important than a little celebration trip we can take any time."

{"No, you go on your trip."} Ur said. {"Trust your guild mates. As long as Gildarts and I are here, we'll be fine. Besides, even if we're not enough to handle them, Irene will be here. And I doubt there's anyone on this continent that could deal with her."}

"Well, I guess I can't argue with that." Alfonzo replied as he leaned back in his chair. "Anyway, I'd suggest throwing Hidan's head in a pit somewhere then filling the pit with cement or something."

{"Actually, I wanted to let Porlyusica study him."} Ur said.

"Yeah, that's a bad idea." Alfonzo said. "I don't know if it will happen, but I feel like immortality isn't something mortals are supposed to have. That's why the people Ankhseram don't fuck with get hit with it."

{ "I see your point." } Ur said. { "Well then, Maybe I'll have Gildarts throw it as far as he can into the ocean. We should never see him again after that." }

With that, Alfonzo and Ur continued to trade ideas of what they should do with Hidan's head.

Bang!

That lasted until the door to Alfonzo's workshop was swung open. When Alfonzo looked back, he saw Cana standing in the doorway with a big smile on her face and a bottle of liquor in one hand while the other rested on her hip.

"Hey, Fonzie!" Cana shouted energetically. "Come have a drink with me. Since my dad is gone, I took this from his stash at Ur's house. It's some really good stuff. It's a forty year vintage, you know?"

{ "What did she just say?" } Ur asked, her voice taking on a menacing tone. { "A forty year vintage? That wasn't Gildarts' bottle. How in the hell did it get into his stash?" }

"Um... Cana, I think you should hold off on opening that bott---" Alfonzo started to say after hearing Ur's angry tone.

Pop!

"Huh? What did you say?" Cana asked as she used one of her cards to open the bottle."

"You know what? Never mind." Alfonzo said while shaking his head. "You can deal with Ur's angry rampage this time."

Immediately, Cana's eyes widened. She had taken liquor from Ur before. And for the first time, she empathized with Elicia and Ultear. Because, she became the third of Alfonzo's wives to receive a frozen spanking. It was almost as bad as when Alfonzo spanked her in front of everyone after the S-Class promotion Exam she passed. In fact, the only reason Alfonzo's spanking was worse was because she was humiliated from being watched by her sisters.

"Damn you, Dad!" Cana groaned. "Oh well, since I'm gonna get punished anyway, might as well make it worth it."

Gulp! *Gulp!* *Gulp!*

Then, without hesitation, Cana put the bottle to her lips and started chugging down its contents.

"*Sigh* Such a waste of good liquor." Alfonzo grumbled.

{"Is she drinking it?"} Ur shrieked. {"Does she have any idea how much I paid for that bottle. Damn it! I'll make her pay for that. And I'm gonna kill Gildarts!"}

Earth Land, Ishgar, Desierto, Ardeshir.

Sneeze!

"Hey, are you okay, Gil?" Fū asked while walking down the streets of Ardeshir. "Did you somehow catch a cold? But it's so hot here. How do you catch a cold in this weather?"

"No, I'm fine." Gildarts replied. "There's probably someone thinking about me. In fact, I bet it's either my baby girl or my lovely lady."

"Oh, that's right, you said you have a daughter." Fū said. "What's her name? do you think she would be my friend?"

"Well, her name is Cana." Gildarts replied with a fond smile. "And if you like to drink, then you'd have no problem being friends with her. Well, that shouldn't stop you from making friends with her either way, though. You'd probably get along with her husband, too."

"Oh, she's married?" Fū asked in an interested tone.

Like that, the two continued to chat while Gildarts dragged the head of the monster, which was actually an Etherious, through the streets to the client's location. All the while, such a large beast's head drew quite a bit of attention from the inhabitants of the city.

Earth Land, Ishgar, Unknown Location.

"Hey, What's taking them so long?" Deidara asked in an irritated one. "I could have used this time to work on my art."

Currently, the remaining members of Akatsuki, Pain, Konan, Itachi, Kisame, Deidara, and the inhuman-looking rogue shinobi from the Village Hidden in the Sand, Sasori, were [Projecting] their images onto the fingers of the Gedō Mazō while waiting for Hidan and Kakuzu to return from their mission to capture the Seven-Tails Jinchuriki, Fū.

"You talk to much." Kisame said in a bored tone.

"What did you say?" Deidara asked in a menacing tone. "It sounded like you said you wanted an up close and personal look at my art."

"If you're really brave enough to try, then go ahead." Kisame shot back.

"Oh, you're talking real big for someone who was too afraid to attack the Nine-Tails brat just because there were some legal wizards around." Deidara said condescendingly.

'I wonder what he would think if he saw Alfonzo Marcus at this year's Grand Magic Games.' Itachi thought to himself. 'Then again, he's just too cocky. And that will be his undoing someday.'

"Enough!" Pain said, silencing the bickering between Kisame and Deidara. "We will all gather at the boarder of the Kingdom of Fiore in two months' time. Fairy Tail is sheltering the Nine-Tails, making them

a hinderance to our plans. And for that, they are no longer necessary for this continent. We will show them Pain."

After Pain's declaration, the rest of the meeting through [Projection Magic] was spent discussing the finer details of the operation. Unfortunately, the six members of Akatsuki had no way of knowing that there was a certain, red-haired, former dragon listening into their conversation with a smile on her face.

Chapter 718: The Super Express Restaurant

"Sometimes it amazes me how different the different towns and villages can look in this kingdom." Brandish said from the back seat of the Escalade as Alfonzo drove through Balsam Village.

And just as Brandish said, instead of a medieval European town, like Magnolia or Crocus, Balsam Village had an eastern or oriental feel to it, with wooden buildings that were reminiscent of old Japanese buildings and swaths of bamboo sticking out from the ground all over the village.

Even so, that did not take away from the affluent atmosphere of the village, as everything in sight gave off a luxurious feel. Especially, the many hot spring inns that could be found in the village.

"Well, there are a lot of different cultures in Fiore." Marin said with a smile from the other side of the back seat.

"Marin's right." Alfonzo added. "And no matter what, people will bring, at least, a little of their culture with them where ever they go."

"I guess that's true." Brandish said as she turned her sight from the window to the front seat. "And that makes me wonder, just where did you two come from? I mean, the clothes and magic items you two make are different from everywhere else I've seen."

In response, Alfonzo, who was driving, and Elicia, who was riding in the passenger seat, only smiled. Even though there were a lot of strange things about the two, with no proof, no one would have much to say.

"Anyway, which inn are we staying at, Alfonzo?" Sun, who was sitting in the middle seat of the back seat, asked while practically bouncing in place. "I really wanna take a dip in the hot spring."

"I booked the inn with the best reviews." Elicia said cheerfully. "It's the one owned by the Edomae."

"Ooh!" Sun squealed happily. "We're gonna stay at Lunar's place? I've been there before. The East/West Merfolk gathering was held there a couple times, ya see?"

"Then, it must be a good place." Marin said. "But there's one really important question, you know?"

Hearing that, everyone focused on Marin, with Alfonzo looking at her through the rear view mirror while everyone else turned to look at her. Then, when Marin had everyone's attention, she smiled with a mixture of playfulness and seduction as she continued.

"Is there mixed bathing?" Marin asked.

Immediately, Elicia and Sun both smiled in response. Meanwhile, Brandish only looked away while rolling her eyes. Though, there was a slight redness that crept onto her cheeks. Alfonzo, on the other hand, only chuckled good-naturedly.

'Well, if there isn't, I'm finding a new inn.' Alfonzo thought to himself.

Like that, the group of five continued to chat light-heartedly while Alfonzo drove through the village. However, Marin, Sun, and Brandish were a bit confused when Alfonzo stopped the car outside of a building that was not a hot springs inn.

"The Super Express restaurant?" Sun asked while leaning forward to see the signboard hanging over the building's front door. "Why are we stopping here, are you hungry, Alfonzo?"

"Well, a little." Alfonzo admitted. "But that's not the reason I stopped here. I have to see something for myself."

While Marin, Sun, and Brandish found themselves even more confused at Alfonzo's response, Elicia rolled her eyes.

"I'm actually surprised it took you so long to come here, Fonzie." Elicia said. "Rumors about the Nodding Chef have been going around for years. He's even the publicly recognized best chef on Ishgar."

Gasp! x 3

In response to Elicia's words, Marin, Sun, and Brandish found themselves gasping in disbelief. Because to them, who had eaten all over the kingdom, there was no better chef than Alfonzo. Brandish even had

the experience of eating in places in two continents. So, she was of the much grander opinion that Alfonzo was the best chef in the world.

"Yeah, I know." Alfonzo replied. "And I really did want to come here. But there are never any high enough ranked quests that bring me past here."

Alfonzo then looked back at Elicia, Marin, and Sun.

"Besides, if I came to Balsam Village by myself, you'd all have something to say about me not bringing you for a hot springs vacation, right?"

None of Alfonzo's wives denied that accusation. And when Alfonzo saw that, he smiled once again. Then, after turning off the magic vehicle's engine, he climbed out, the ladies following him shortly afterwards.

All five then took a good look at the tall, yet narrow, building in front of them. And just like the rest of the buildings in the village, it had an oriental architectural style. The entrance was a red, sliding door. The rest of the building was made of wood, and it had blue tiles on the roof. Also, there was a large, golden, dragon head statue on the roof, as well. And in front of the building, there was a pink statue of a frog holding an umbrella and sitting on a rock.

"Well, it definitely has a unique feel to it." Marin said while looking up at the building. "I like the golden dragon statue, though."

"Yeah, it looks pretty cool." Sun said enthusiastically. "Come on, let's go inside. I wanna see if the rumors about the chef here are true."

With that, the group headed towards the front door and entered the establishment. When they did, the first thing they saw was the long bar that stretched across the restaurant and the wooden stools lined up in front of it. Looking to either side, they could see a few tables close to each wall.

Looking past the bar, there was a fireplace built into the back wall. Above the fireplace, there were shelves hanging with many small statues and bottles of beverages and alcohol. However, what caught the most attention was the man standing behind the bar.

The man, also known as the Nodding Chef wore a white robe with black trim. Standing with his arms crossed in front of his chest, his stoic facial expression let anyone who saw him know he was serious about what he did. He also had a well-groomed mustache and eyes that seemed to always be closed that said something about his meticulous nature. Yet, none of those things were what really stood out about him.

No, it was his extremely tall forehead. In fact, his forehead looked to be about three quarters of the height of the rest of his body, if not more.

And while Alfonzo and Elicia were expecting something like this, Marin, Sun, and Brandish could not help gawking for a moment. However, as they were all experienced wizards, they returned to their senses quickly enough.

The Grand Magic Games champions, after taking in the interior of the restaurant, made their way towards the bar. Yet, when Alfonzo and the Nodding Chef made eye contact, everyone, even the other guests in the restaurant, felt the atmosphere change.

With narrowed eyes, Alfonzo sized up the Nodding Chef. At the same time, the Nodding Chef actually opened his eyes slightly, revealing a pair of deep, obsidian orbs, that did the same.

"Oh, Snap!" Elicia whisper-shouted. "It's about to go down."

"Why is this so intense?" Marin asked in a confused tone.

"I don't know." Sun replied. "But it seems like fun."

Brandish, on the other hand, was curious to know if there would be some kind of cooking duel.

While this was going on, the group eventually reached the bar. They then sat down on the stools, Marin, Elicia, Alfonzo, Sun, and Brandish, from left to right. Then, before anyone could say anything, Alfonzo placed his elbows on the bar top, cupped his right fist with his left hand, and supported his chin with his thumbs while the rest of his fingers covered his mouth, all while maintaining eye contact with the Nodding Chef.

"Give me your best dish." Alfonzo said calmly, not even looking at the menu first.

True to his moniker, the Nodding Chef nodded his head in response. He then looked to each of the ladies to take their orders, as well. Yet, they were not as quick to order, as they wanted to look through the menu first. Even so, it did not take long for the four to order, as well.

With that, the Nodding Chef got to work. Skillfully, he prepared the ingredients for the five's meal. In fact, he was so focused that everyone in the restaurant, whether they were eating or just enjoying a drink, stopped to watch him. And they had to say, they were impressed by what they saw. Even Alfonzo's four companions wore impressed expressions, as it was rare for them to watch Alfonzo when he cooked.

Alfonzo, on the other hand, maintained his stoic expression, watching the Nodding Chef's every move like a hawk, nodding his head from time to time as he did so.

The restaurant remained silent the whole time the Nodding Chef cooked their meal. Even the new customers who came into the restaurant fell silent after sensing the atmosphere.

Eventually, the Nodding Chef finished cooking before plating all five meals. He then carried them to the bar and placed them in front of the five Fairy Tail wizards. However, when everyone picked up their silverware, his attention was focused solely on Alfonzo.

"Hey, Lici." Marin whispered. "Is this a little bit strange to you?"

"Not really." Elicia replied as she picked up a piece of pork from her plate. "Just think of it like when two wizards size each other up. This time, however, it's two chefs."

"Does that happen?" Marin asked in puzzlement.

"Well, I guess you're not the most competitive wizard around." Elicia said with a smile after chewing and swallowing her food. "But yeah, it happens. I do the same when I meet another fashion designer, too."

"I see..." Marin said, clearly still not getting it.

Meanwhile, Alfonzo slowly cut a piece of the steak that was placed in front of him. He then put the piece of beef on the end of his fork into his mouth and closed his eyes while he chewed. Then, after savoring the taste, he swallowed the food and opened his eyes, looking directly into the Nodding Chef's barely opened eyes.

"It's good." Alfonzo said with a nod. "On par with Grayfia... No, more like Maria. Very well done."

Yet, the Nodding Chef seemed dissatisfied with Alfonzo's assessment. He then pointed towards the kitchen while staring at Alfonzo.

"What is he trying to say?" Marin asked.

"He wants Alfonzo to cook the same dish." Elicia explained. "Apparently, he's not happy with Alfonzo's praise, as high as it is."

"I see." Marin replied.

Alfonzo, on the other hand, nodded his head. However, he did not get up immediately. Instead, he continued to eat at an unhurried pace, thinking it would be disrespectful to not finish his meal while it was still hot.

Understanding the meaning of Alfonzo's actions, the Nodding Chef... well... Nodded. Then he went back to serving his customers. Yet, the atmosphere in the restaurant did not return to what it was before Alfonzo and the ladies stepped into the restaurant, as everyone recognized the challenge behind the Nodding Chef's actions.

In this atmosphere, time passed quickly. Everyone in the restaurant enjoyed their meals. Though, they were looking forward to seeing who would be declared the winner of this little cooking duel.

"Are you sure you want to challenge him, Alfonzo?" Brandish asked in her usual bored tone. "He uses some kind of [Cooking Magic], right? That will give him a huge advantage."

"There's more to cooking than using magic." Alfonzo replied calmly after finishing the last bite of his meal. He then continued as he stood up from his stool. "And I'll show him just what pure skill can do."

As Alfonzo stood up, all eyes in the restaurant were drawn to him, and that included those of the Nodding Chef. However, his gaze did not linger long, as he was in the middle of cooking for one of the new arrivals. Even so, he nodded to Alfonzo, telling him to come behind the bar.

And Alfonzo did just that, calmly walking around the bar to gain access to the kitchen. Then, when he was back there, he stood off to the side and waited for the Nodding Chef to finish.

It took a few more minutes for the Nodding Chef to serve the customer. Then, he turned to look at Alfonzo and once again nodded his head.

Taking the Nodding's Chef's nod as permission to begin, Alfonzo gathered the same ingredients the Nodding Chef used to cook his meal. Then, he began preparing them. And just like the Nodding Chef, Alfonzo also used his magic while cooking. However, instead of using magic to improve the quality of the food, he used his [Metal Magic] to tend to the pots and cut the ingredients.

Seeing pots, spatulas, knives, forks, and other kitchenware floating around at Alfonzo's whim, the customers were amazed. Meanwhile, the Nodding Chef, like Alfonzo had done before, watched Alfonzo's every move with laser-focus.

Then, after fifteen minutes, Alfonzo, with a plate in hand, stepped away from the kitchen before handing the plate to the Nodding Chef.

"Go ahead." Alfonzo said after the Nodding Chef received the plate.

Staring at Alfonzo for a moment longer, the Nodding Chef eventually turned to the bar and placed the plate atop it. Then, he took a fork and a knife before slowly cutting the steak Alfonzo prepared. A moment later, he placed the meat in his mouth and began to chew.

Not even three chews later, the Nodding Chef raised his head to the sky, causing Alfonzo to have to dodge away from his abnormally long head. Then, to everyone in the restaurant's surprise, tears began falling from the Nodding Chef's eyes as his face reddened and he began to writhe in place.

"Well, I think that settles it." Alfonzo said as a smile spread across his face. He then turned around and washed his hands before slowly walking around the bar. He then took a business card and the money for the five meals out of his wallet and placed them on the bar next to the Nodding Chef's plate while he continued to eat. "If you wanna challenge me again, just call this number."

After that, Alfonzo turned around and started walking towards the restaurant's entrance without looking back.

"He's so dramatic." Elicia said while rolling her eyes. Though, there was a fond smile on her face.

"Alfonzo is so cool." Sun cheered happily as she hopped off her bar stool and followed Alfonzo to the door.

"That was... something." Brandish said as she, too, stood up from her stool.

"I agree with Brandish." Marin said. She then smiled widely as she stood up from her stool, as well. Then, she grabbed Elicia's arm and started pulling her towards the door. "Anyway, let's go. We got hot springs to soak in."

Smiling as she allowed herself to be dragged along, Elicia glanced back over her shoulder and looked at the Nodding Chef, who had returned to his meal.

"Fonzie's cooking really will bring world peace someday." Elicia said as she was pulled out the door.

Chapter 719: Edomae Hot Spring Inn

"So, this is the inn Lunar's family owns, huh?" Elicia said as she looked up at the building in front of her and the other four wizards of Fairy Tail. "It's quite luxurious."

As Elicia said, the building in front of her, Alfonzo, Marin, Sun, and Brandish was an elegant, Japanese-style building constructed with wood. There were two floors, a wooden veranda surrounding the first floor. IN the front of the building, the courtyard was furnished with several gazebos, a rock garden, and a bamboo forest in one corner, as well. There was also a tall wooden fence surrounding the entire property.

"Yup!" Sun said excitedly. "They have a lot of baths, too. And their all really nice, ya see?"

"If they weren't, I would be disappointed." Brandish said in her usual tone.

"Well, let's go check in." Alfonzo said with a smile. "Then, we can enjoy the hot springs."

"Yeah, besides, we still haven't gotten an answer to the most important question." Marin said with a grin. "Is there a mixed-bath, or not?"

While Elicia and Sun nodded their heads, curious to know the answer to Marin's question, Brandish rolled her eyes. Alfonzo, on the other hand, only shook his head before taking the first step towards the inn's front door.

With Alfonzo taking the lead, Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish were quick to follow. Before long, they reached the entrance and stepped through the front doors.

"Welcome." A middle-aged woman wearing a kimono with her hair styled into a bun said, welcoming the guests. "How may I--- Oh! Miss Sun, what a pleasant surprise."

"Hi, Aunt Yumi." Sun said cheerfully. "Long time, no see."

"Indeed." The proprietress, Yumi, said with a smile. "I believe it has been ten years since I last saw you. According to Miss Lunar, you joined a guild since the last time you were here. And just the other day, I saw you were a member of the team that won the Grand Magic Games this year. So, I would assume you have been doing well since then."

"I have." Sun replied with a smile. "I got married since then, too."

Reaching that point, Sun grabbed Alfonzo's arm and pulled him towards Yumi.

"And this is my husband, Alfonzo Marcus." Sun said, introducing Alfonzo to her old acquaintance. She then turned back and gestured to Elicia and Marin. "And these are two of his other wives, Elicia and Marin."

With Sun's introduction, both Elicia and Marin stepped forward and greeted Yumi. Then, Sun turned to Brandish.

"And this is our friend and guild mate, Brandish." Sun said, introducing the last member of the group. "She's also the fifth member of our Grand Magic Games' team."

With Sun's introduction, Brandish only nodded her head. Yumi nodded in return. Then, she turned to Sun again.

"So, shall I book a room for you and your... family?" Yumi asked.

"Actually, we already have a reservation." Elicia said. "I booked it last week. "

"Hmm..." Yumi hummed as she looked away from the guests and down at her guest ledger. "What's the name on the reservation, Ma'am?"

"Elicia Marcus Taylor." Elicia said happily.

"Elicia Marcus... Taylor..." Yumi said while looking through the ledger. However, when she registered the name Elicia said, her eyes opened wide in shock. Then, her head snapped up to stare at Elicia. "You! You're the owner of the Taylor Shop, aren't you?"

"Yup! That's me." Elicia said happily.

An excited smile appeared on Yumi's face. Then, she came out from behind the counter and ran in front of Elicia and grabbed the magic Seamstress' hands.

"Please, I would like to put in an order for new uniforms for the staff of at inn." Yumi said while shaking Elicia's hands vigorously.

Elicia could only smile wryly while not knowing what to do.

Seeing this, Alfonzo tried his best not to laugh at Elicia. A moment later, he got his urges under control. Then, he stepped forward and spoke.

"I'm sure Lici would be willing to take your order later." Alfonzo said while shaking his head. "But right now, we're kind of on vacation after the Grand Magic Games, you know? So, we'd like to check into our room."

Yumi froze in place after hearing Alfonzo. Then, she began to blush in embarrassment, realizing that she had lost herself in trying to fulfill the leader of the Edomae Group's, Lunar's father's, orders to get the inn's uniforms upgraded. Unfortunately, before today, she did not have time, as there were many people who were commuting from Balsam Village each day to watch the Grand Magic Games. Then, they decided to stay for a few more days to enjoy the hot springs while they were here. So, she simply did not have the time to place the order.

"Yes." Yumi said as she let go of Elicia's hands. She then took a step back and pretended to straighten out any wrinkles in her kimono. "Please excuse me. You're right. Allow me to lead you to your room."

Then, without giving anyone the chance to speak on what just happened, Yumi turned around and started walking towards the inn's interior, her pace making it easy for the five Fairy Tail wizards to catch up.

Despite the slow pace at which Yumi walked, Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish did not follow her immediately. Instead, they all exchanged glances. Then, while everyone chuckled and Brandish's lips twitched, they finally started following Yumi. And when they saw how red Yumi's ears were as they

walked behind her, Alfonzo's, Elicia's, Marin's, and Sun's chuckling turned into full-blown laughter while Brandish's twitching lip turned into a smile.

Along the way, the group got their laughter under control and Yumi's embarrassment faded, though it was not gone completely, and the group eventually reached the room, after climbing the stairs to the second floor. When they did, Yumi slid open the shoji.

"This is your room." Yumi said, her professional smile finally making it back onto her face. "This is our inn's most luxurious room, as it has several separate sleeping areas, its own hot spring pool, sent through pipes from underground, as well as a balcony overlooking the courtyard."

Impressed by the description of the room, Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, Sun, and Brandish stepped inside and looked around while Yumi bowed slightly at the room's entrance. After a quick look around the room, they all turned back to Yumi and nodded in approval.

"It's great." Elicia said happily.

"Uh huh!" Marin intoned with a smile on her face. "This week is gonna be so relaxing."

"I'm satisfied." Brandish said casually, her usual tone on full display.

"Now, let's go to the hot springs!" Sun said, bouncing on the balls of her feet in excitement.

Seeing how excited the ladies were, Alfonzo could not help smiling. He then turned to look at Yumi once again and decided to ask the question that Marin and the other ladies had been concerned about.

"So, is there a mixed bath in this inn?" Alfonzo asked with a smile.

Hearing Alfonzo's question, Elicia, Marin, and Sun all had their eyes light up. Meanwhile, Brandish blushed minutely. Yumi, on the other hand, smiled, as she knew that three of the four women in the room were Alfonzo's wives. And from what she could tell, Brandish had an interest in Alfonzo, as well. Though, she was not sure if that interest was romantic due to Brandish's usual bored expression.

"We do." Yumi said, causing the girls' reactions to intensify. "But unlike the many other kinds hot spring baths, the mixed bath must be booked in advance."

Yumi then reached into the sleeve of her kimono and pulled out a small notebook before slipping it open.

"Would you like to book a time slot?" Yumi asked while looking down into the book.

"Yes, please!" Marin said happily.

"Hmm... Let's see." Yumi said while flipping pages until she reached the one for today's date. "We have openings from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. to closing, which is at 11 p.m. By the way, all the baths are closed from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. for cleaning. Though, you're free to use the bath in your room at any time. We'll clean it when we clean the rooms each day, though."

"Understood." Alfonzo replied with a nod. He then turned his attention to his wives, not sure if Brandish would be willing to take a bath with him, since they were not in any sort of romantic relationship. So, when do you wanna hit the bath?"

Elicia, Marin, and sun cheered in response, while Brandish simply nodded her head. Seeing that, Alfonzo Then, he turned to Yumi once again while pulling his iPhone out of his pocket to check the time.

"Our timing was good." Alfonzo muttered while looking down at the time. "Because we stopped at the restaurant, it's almost 2. So, can we book the mixed bath for an hour at 2?"

"Of course." Yumi said while pulling a pen out of her sleeve and jotting down the booking in her note book.

On a side note, the notebook in Yumi's hand was one of a set of magical items that were distributed to all those responsible for booking times for the mixed baths. That way, if a change was made to it, it would be transcribed into all the notebooks. As a result, there would be no double bookings.

In fact, the inn staff carried more than one of these notebooks, that way, room service orders, room reservations, and other services could be made known to all the staff responsible for such things.

"Then, if you would follow me." Yumi said after putting the notebook away. "I'll lead you to the baths."

With that, Yumi bowed and gestured out of the room. However, the five Fairy Tail wizards did not exit the room immediately. Instead, they put their luggage in the rooms they intended to stay in. Though, that was after taking their bags from Alfonzo, who was carrying all of them.

Once the bags were in place, the six made their way down to the inns first floor. Then, they walked through the corridors until they came across three large entrances with curtains hanging in front of them. Each of the curtains, from right to left, had the words male, mixed, and female embroidered on them.

"We have arrived." Yumi said. "As I mentioned, the mixed baths must be reserved. However, feel free to take a dip in the baths for each gender whenever you like during the operating hours. As for your clothing, you can put them in the baskets in the changing room. Our staff will come by at the end of your reservation and wash them for you. Then, they will be returned to your room once they are dry."

"Thanks, Aunt Yumi." Sun said cheerfully. Then, she grabbed Alfonzo's arm and started pulling him towards the mixed bath. "Now, let's get going. I wanna take a bath."

Smiling at his wife's antics, Alfonzo allowed himself to be dragged along, he and Sun the first to enter the changing room. Shortly afterwards, Elicia made her way into the changing room with a smile on her face, as well.

Marin was about to follow them. However, she noticed that Brandish was hesitating. So, once Yumi bowed and returned to her duties, she sidled up to her indecisive friend.

"It's okay if your uncomfortable with this, you know?" Marin said. "You don't have to force yourself to be like the rest of us. We're all his wives, after all. But that's not the same for you. You're a friend, a teammate, and a guild mate."

"I know that." Brandish replied in her usual tone. "I'm just not sure what I want."

Although Marin had teased Brandish about wanting to dominate Alfonzo when they were in Crocus, she knew that was just one of Brandish's kinks, stemming from liking to be in control of a situation. As for wanting to be with Alfonzo, Marin knew that Brandish was not sure about her feelings. Especially after reuniting with and clearing the misunderstanding about Lucy, Lucy's mother, Layla, her mother, Grammi, and herself. Brandish had been influenced by all of Lucy's stories about her time with Alfonzo ever since they met about three years ago.

Unfortunately, all those stories did was confuse Brandish's feelings. Though, it would be a lie to say that Brandish had not grown rather fond of Alfonzo because of them. But were those feelings romantic? She could not say.

"Well, if you want to join us, we won't decline." Marin said. "But don't do anything that would make yourself uncomfortable, okay?"

In response, Brandish nodded. Then, she watched as Marin entered the mixed bath to join Alfonzo, Elicia, and Sun, leaving her standing in the corridor with a contemplative expression on her face.

Chapter 720: In the Hot Spring Baths

Having just walked into the mixed bath's changing room, Alfonzo and Sun started getting undressed. And just as Yumi said, each article of clothing they took off, they placed in one of the baskets in the room. Then, shortly after they started getting undressed, Elicia also entered the room.

"This never gets old." Elicia said as she licked her lips while staring up and down at Alfonzo, who was only wearing his underwear with his chiseled, muscular body nearly on full display. "Mama like."

Hearing that, Alfonzo only shook his head with a smile on his face as he bent over and took off his underwear.

Meanwhile, seeing an opportunity, Elicia darted forward. Then, when she was standing right next to Alfonzo, she...

Smack!

... slapped his butt, making the sound echo around the changing room. IN fact, the sound was so loud and unexpected, that Sun, who was about to slip off her panties, like Alfonzo, jumped in surprise.

"Ehehehe!" Elicia giggled in amusement after catching Sun's surprised jump from the corner of her eyes.

"It-It's not funny." Sun said shyly as she, too, slipped off the last article of clothes she was wearing. She then picked up a wash cloth from next to the basket where she placed her clothing before grabbing Alfonzo and pulling him towards the bath. "Come on, Alfonzo. Let's go."

"Okay, okay, I'm coming." Alfonzo said while once again shaking his head as Sun pulled him along.

Elicia's giggles continued as Sun reached the sliding door separating the changing room and the bath. Yet, Sun decided that being embarrassed at Elicia's teasing was much less important than getting to the bath. So, she pulled the door open.

When she did, she found a hot spring bath on the other side surrounded by a smooth wooden floor. The bath was large enough to fit seven or eight people comfortably. Along the wall to the left of the bath, there were four shower heads on the wall with small wooden stools in front of them. To the right of each shower head, there was a stand holding several different soaps, shampoos, and conditioners. Basically, anything that a guest might prefer.

Opposite the wall with the shower heads, there was a glass door leading to a sauna. On the back wall, there was a glass wall, or rather a one-way mirror, that overlooked the back courtyard of the inn, which was quite picturesque. And finally, there was no ceiling, making this hot spring an open air bath.

"Damn... I kinda wish I had built our bath like this." Alfonzo muttered while looking around the mixed bathing area. "Instead, I put it on an underground floor. I'm kinda kicking myself right now."

"Yeah, but it's right next to the training room." Sun said cheerfully as she continued to pull Alfonzo long, each step making her rather impressive assets jiggle. "And a bath right after training is amazing."

"I guess you're right." Alfonzo replied with a smile. "It does have its perks, doesn't it."

"Uh huh!" Sun said enthusiastically while nodding her head with vigor. "Now, come on, Alfonzo. Let me wash your back."

"Sure." Alfonzo replied with a smile.

The two then moved towards the stools, with Sun sitting Alfonzo on one of them when they arrived. Then, while kneeling behind him, Sun reached forward, pressing her naked body against his back in the process, as she reached for the shower head and turned on the hot water.

"Is the temperature good?" Sun asked as she sprayed the water from the shower head on Alfonzo's hands.

"Yeah, it's fine." Alfonzo replied with a nod. "You know, with my passive magic power defenses, temperature doesn't really matter to me for stuff like this, right?"

"Still, it's better to be comfortable, ya see?" Sun replied in a serious tone. "Baths are for relaxing, after all."

"Guess I can't argue with that." Alfonzo replied with a shrug and a smile.

Next, Sun sprayed both hers and Alfonzo's bodies with the shower head. Then, she put it back and turned off the hot water. After that, she once again reached over Alfonzo, this time putting a generous helping of body wash on her hand.

After that, she rubbed her hand together to get a good lather going. And finally, she began to wash Alfonzo's back with her hands.

"How's that." Sun asked cheerfully.

"Great." Alfonzo replied with a content smile.

Smiling happily, Sun became more enthusiastic while she washed Alfonzo's back.

Around that time, the sliding door opened again. When it did, Elicia, like Alfonzo and Sun, walked in without a thread of clothing. And when she saw Sun washing Alfonzo's back, her eyes lit up.

"I'll help, too." Elicia said as she jogged towards the two.

Then, without waiting for a response, Elicia picked up the shower head in front of Alfonzo, turned on the hot water while making Alfonzo bow his head. She then started to get his dreads wet, clearly intending to wash his hair.

While doing that, Elicia turned to look at the available shampoos. However, she somewhat frowned when she saw them.

"They don't have the best selection here." Elicia muttered. "But I guess this will work."

With that, Elicia made sure that Alfonzo's hair had all been wetted. Then, she turned off the water and put the shower head back on the hook. After that, she picked up the shampoo she decided on and squeezed some into her other hand.

While Elicia began lathering his hair, Alfonzo felt Sun's body pressed against his back once again. However, instead of reaching for something, Sun wrapped her arms around his torso. Then, she started rubbing herself up and down on his back. Meanwhile, her hands started moving up and down his chest and abs.

"You know I can get the front myself, right?" Alfonzo asked while wondering how he ended up in such a cliché hentai situation.

"I know." Sun replied cheerfully. "But this way, I get to clean my front, too. Two birds with one stone."

"Actually, I think we got two stones here." Elicia said while giggling as she looked between Alfonzo's legs.

"Can you blame me?" Alfonzo asked, completely unbothered by Elicia's joke.

"Not at all." Elicia replied. "If I had one, I'm sure Sun would make mine hard, too."

At first, when Sun heard the part about two stones, she tilted her head in confusion. However, as Alfonzo and Elicia's conversation continued, she quickly understood what they meant. Then, with a smile on her face, Sun's hands started to creep lower and lower while she washed Alfonzo's front.

Just at that moment, the sound of the sliding door sliding open could be heard once again. The three then looked in its direction, only to see Marin, naked like the others, closing the door behind her.

"Hey! No fair!" Marin exclaimed after seeing the situation Alfonzo, Elicia, and Sun were in. "I wanna help, too."

With a slight pout on her face, Marin walked over to the group of four. She then used the shower head to wet down the front of her body. After that, she picked up the bottle of bodywash before squeezing it all over her breasts and chest. After that, she put the bodywash back on the rack. Then, she rubbed her hands over her chest, creating a lather.

"There we go." Marin said as she knelt down next to Alfonzo.

Marin then took hold of Alfonzo's arm and hugged it against her chest. Then, like Sun, she started rubbing her body against Alfonzo's arm.

"Two birds with one stone." Marin said with a smile.

"Actually, if you count the one Sun threw, I think we're up to four birds and three stones now." Elicia said, her giggles growing more intense.

Stopping to think about what Elicia said for a moment, the erotic novel enthusiast did not take long to understand her meaning. She then grinned as she looked down between Alfonzo's legs.

"Yeah, and I know this one can knock down more than three birds on its own." Marin said as she unwrapped one of her arms from around Alfonzo's and lowered her hand down to his crotch.

"Take it easy, Marin." Alfonzo said, blocking Marin's hand while trying to keep his wits about him, despite the enviable situation he was in. "We can't do this here, it's an open air bath. Everyone will hear us. Wait until we get back to our room. I'll put up a barrier there. Plus, you know we're gonna take a lot longer than the hour we booked."

"Tch! Fine." Marin said after clicking her tongue.

After that, the sound of chatting, giggling, and laughter echoed around the bath for a while. During that time, Elicia, Sun, and Marin cooperated to bathe Alfonzo. Then, once they were done, Alfonzo took his time to bathe each of them in turn.

After that, the four got into the bath and enjoyed their time until there was roughly fifteen minutes left until they had to leave. Then, the group got out of the hot spring and spent the remaining time in the sauna before leaving the bath to return to their room.

As for Brandish? Let's go back to the time when Marin entered the changing room.

Standing in the inn's hallway, just outside the baths, Brandish was wrestling with herself.

'Should I go in there?' Brandish asked. 'I mean, it's just a mixed bath. And I'm not particularly concerned with being seen naked by a man. But why is this making me so nervous?'

['Isn't that obvious?'] A rough, female voice said from Brandish's inner world.

Naturally, that voice belonged to Brandish's [Armament Spirit], Hecatoncheires, a giant woman with fair skin, long, flowing blue hair, bright red eyes, and red horns growing from the sides of her head wearing a set of leather armor that covered almost every inch of her skin, a stark contrast to Brandish's attire that leaves very little to the imagination.

'If it was so obvious, would I be out here fretting over it like this?' Brandish asked internally.

["*Sigh* And that's why you should have never started reading those kind of books, Brandish."] Hecatoncheires said in an exasperated and disappointed tone. ["You've forgotten about your modesty, haven't you? Then again, you always dressed like a harlot even before you found those kind of books, didn't you?"]

'Hey! I'm no harlot!' Brandish argued back fiercely. 'I'm still a virgin, you already know that.'

["Of course I do."] Hecatoncheires replied. ["I'm a part of you, remember? Besides, I didn't call you a harlot. I only said you dress like one. I mean, seriously, would it kill you to put on some real clothes?"]

'It just might.' Brandish replied, calming down quickly. 'It's so much work to put on all those pieces of clothing. What I'm wearing right now only takes like thirty seconds. It's perfect.'

["*Sigh* You know, dressing a little conservatively might have made him notice you already."] Hecatoncheires said, her exasperation increasing. ["I mean, what man wants a woman that shows off everything to everyone, all the time?"]

In response, Brandish stiffened as her eyes widened in surprise while a blush crept onto her cheeks.

'Wha-Wha-Wha... What are you talking about?' Brandish asked. 'When have I ever said that I wanted Alfonzo to notice me?'

["*Sigh* First of all, I am you, Brandish."] Hecatoncheires replied, just sounding tired at this point. ["Secondly, even if I didn't know that, I never said anything about Alfonzo. You basically just told on yourself, you know?"]

The blush on Brandish's cheeks exploded to cover the entirety of her face, her neck, part of her chest, and her ears when she realized the truth in Hecatoncheires words. Yet, that was enough for Brandish to make her decision on the spot.

Turning sharply, with her face still red, Brandish went towards one of the curtained off baths next to the mixed baths.

["That's the men's bath."] Hecatoncheires said flatly.

Looking up, Brandish realized that Hecatoncheires was right once again. So, she once again turned sharply. Then, she started walking, the sound of footsteps thudding throughout the hallway. Then, she rushed into the women's changing room, quickly got undressed, entered the bathing area, washed herself off just as quickly, and finally, stepped into the bath before submerging herself completely while ignoring the comments about how letting her hair touch the water is bad manners from the other women in the hot spring pool.

Brandish did eventually calm down, however. When she did, she raised her head from the water, only to be stared at with nasty glares from the other guests. However, Brandish was completely unphased.

Instead, she checked the time on the wall. Then, she relaxed until near three o'clock before getting out to join the rest of her team.

Then, after the group of five met up, they returned to their room together. And while Brandish sat in the common area of the room, Alfonzo, Elicia, Marin, and Sun went into a room together. And it did not take a genius to figure out what they were in there to do.