

The Noble 396

Chapter 396: Fierce Exchange(2)

~Moments before ~

BANG! CLANG! BRUM!

Those sounds marked the continuous clash between Mitrass and Seraphina as they moved at high speed through the dark forest.

But none of the other three paid any attention to them.

Seraphina's doppelgänger focused her attention on Noha and Oryx.

She had only one functioning arm. Part of her side was missing.

Chaotic energy was deteriorating her body, made entirely of mana.

It was not an advantageous situation. And she couldn't afford to waste time.

Without hesitating even a fraction of a second, she began.

"Cadentis Zone." (Falling Zone)

Seraphina's voice resonated with unnatural calm.

It was her first attack.

Noha and Oryx reacted instantly, activating defenses and preparations like the veteran mages they were.

Neither let their guard down despite the obvious lack of an arm and destroyed side: Seraphina's demonic appearance radiated pure danger.

Above all, neither of them recognized the magic or runes she had just used; they only understood that she had used a large amount of mana.

Brrrr~

The air trembled.

But...

Nothing happened.

There was no explosion, elemental phenomenon, or visible attack.

Everything seemed the same.

Brrrr~

Just a slight vibration, so subtle it was almost harmless.

The confusion lasted only a moment.

"Ira Caelorum." (Wrath of Heaven)

Seraphina's words broke the silence.

Mana gathered above.

CRACK—!

A bolt of lightning struck.

It was fast, but seemingly weak, so both interpreted it as a distraction.

A mistake on their part.

BRRROOMM!

The impact against Noha's crystalline barrier detonated in a brutal explosion.

A pillar of light rose, expanding as if it wanted to consume the entire area in an instant.

Even so, Oryx reacted in time and moved alongside Noha to escape the core of the damage.

He teleported.

But not to the desired point.

When he reappeared, he was still within the radius of the expanding pillar.

Nothing like this had ever happened before, to the point that Oryx was stunned, and the light and lightning spells were still fast, even for his skill.

In the end, he reacted too late.

"Cough! What... what was that?"

The damage hit him before he could force a second jump.

Noha and Oryx appeared elsewhere, but the latter was coughing up blood. Visible wounds ran across his body. He had escaped by inches.

It wasn't because he underestimated Seraphina. It was exactly the opposite.

Both of them had been analyzing the two "harmless" spells, trying to anticipate their true purpose.

But no amount of previous experience was enough.

'Is it because of this arrow...? Why can't I remove it?

Confused, his mind worked at full speed because of that failure.

His gaze fell on the arrow embedded in his abdomen.

It seemed obvious that this was the cause, not to mention that, for some reason, he couldn't remove it, either physically or with his Skill; it seemed fused to his flesh.

But it wasn't.

The real source was Seraphina's previous spell.

Gravity.

A branch even rarer than the spatial one.

Something she had begun practicing since obtaining it a few months ago.

She found it very useful because it was a very versatile branch in combat and was also the perfect counter to one of the most difficult magical branches to deal with in combat, spatial magic.

The spell didn't nullify his magic, it didn't block it... it simply twisted the gravity of the area enough that space was no longer reliable.

That slight misalignment was enough.

Within that field, Oryx's teleportation didn't fail completely...

But it failed.

"Enough! "

Noha's voice exploded.

Covered by his crystal cloak, barely affected compared to Oryx, he looked at Seraphina with contained anger.

Her magical execution was swift. Precise. Violent.

But he was also competent.

And if Seraphina had finished executing her move...

He had been preparing his as well.

Frusshh!!

It was almost instantaneous.

Within a gigantic radius, the entire ground turned to sand.

It wasn't a gradual transition or a progressive collapse. The ground simply gave way, as if reality had been replaced.

Seraphina felt the change underfoot and looked down reflexively.

Too late.

A colossal jaw, filled with countless teeth, was already closing in on her.

Art of Radiance, Fourth Stance: Refraction Nodes

She didn't let it happen.

A firm platform of light formed beneath her feet, which had lost their support on solid ground.

It held her up and propelled her upward at great speed.

Even so, she felt the pressure.

The owner of those teeth was hot on her heels.

"Cadentia Inversa", "Pondus Multiplicatum" (Inverse Falling, Multiplied Weight)

The reaction was immediate.

Two spells fell upon her at the same time: the gravity affecting her was reversed and her weight multiplied abruptly.

Her body ascended as if she were falling, breaking through the air. The distance between her and the creature suddenly widened.

When she thought it was enough without losing control, she turned around and created another platform under her feet, remaining upside down.

From there, she looked down.

Oryx and Noha remained on what looked like an island of solid ground, surrounded by the sea of sand that was now spinning in a vortex.

The worm continued to emerge and try to reach her, still not showing its entire body, but it was already clear that it was a colossal creature.

At the same time, from another angle, a black condor wrapped in lightning ascended violently toward her.

Two beasts of the ten-star.

They were not her priority.

"Saltus Spatii"(Spatial Leap)

Seraphina completely ignored the summons and teleported.

The spell affected her.

She did not appear where she had planned. The jump was imprecise, but it was something she had taken into account, and in any case, she was not far away.

Click!.

With her only hand, she snapped her fingers.

Self-suggestion for casting spells was a technique Seraphina had trained thoroughly, even while teaching it to others.

Linking a spell to a gesture allowed it to be activated almost immediately, which was crucial in combat where there was no direct magical affinity.

Her favorite gesture was that one: the snap of her fingers. Fast, precise, easy to reinforce mentally. Depending on the force and intention, the same movement could produce different effects: a purification, a soundproofing spell... or, in this case—

BROMMMM!!

A violent stream of lightning burst from her position, devouring the space in front of her.

The attack was directed at Oryx and Noha.

Both moved, and Seraphina didn't have to think too hard about where.

The sand vortex had engulfed everything, and she had finished destroying the last stable point on the ground.

Only the sky remained.

Seraphina looked up and spotted them immediately. Oryx and Noha were already mounting the condor.

Thanks to Noha's summoning Skill, the beast had been called from a nearby distance.

They gained height. Stability.

But she didn't let it continue like that.

"Saltus Spatii." (Spatial Leap)

Click!.

She repeated her attack, but this time it was different.

Oryx and Noha were not novices. They had both anticipated the repetition. Defenses and counterattacks were activated almost simultaneously.

BOOMMM!!

The clash was immediate. The shockwave shook the air and forced everyone to readjust their position.

Seraphina maneuvered on the luminous platform, without taking her attention away from either of them.

"Ira Caelorum." (Wrath of Heaven)

The thought was brief.

She cast the long-range lightning and light spell again.

This time they didn't dodge.

They relied on their now-stabilized defenses and counterattacked at the same time. Oryx distorted space.

Noha released plant magic as another circle formed behind him.

BOMM! BRrrss! Slllsss CRUUMM! BRUOMM!

The exchange exploded.

Magic after magic collided in the air. Impacts, deflections, ruptures. The sky filled with crisscrossing trajectories.

Fwosshh!!

Amidst the impacts, something emerged. To Seraphina's left.

She saw it instantly and attacked.

Fswuss!

Her attack was blocked.

In the next instant, the thing was already in front of her.

It was a red mantis, a head taller than her. With its scythe pointing directly at her neck.

Seraphina leaned back by a hair's breadth. The scythe grazed her.

Another ten-star beast, with agility being its forte.

At the same time, a disturbance in space.

Oryx appeared some distance to her right. From the obvious annoyance on his face, it wasn't the exact spot he was looking for, But he didn't stop to think about it much.

A silver beam of light shot toward her in a coordinated attack.

Bang!

Seraphina, still dodging the mantis, raised her only hand and aimed at the beam.

She fired.

Brumm!

Both attacks neutralized each other.

THUD!

Without pause, Seraphina immediately unleashed a brutal kick against the Mantis that had missed its attack.

"Pondus Multiplicatum." (Multiplied Weight)

The impact threw her to the ground, and before she could steady herself, another spell fell upon her, violently increasing her weight. The creature was dragged with greater force toward the sandy vortex.

"Let's see how you handle this."

His first attack was intercepted, but Oryx was already in motion. The mana above him stirred violently, and above his head, the sky began to warp.

The distortion advanced toward Seraphina, dense, unstable, dangerous.

Halfway there—

BANG!

"Huh?!"

Seraphina's projectile of light crossed the spell and nullified it.

Oryx could accept that a minor attack was intercepted. But this...

This was different.

He didn't understand how a larger-scale spell had been neutralized in the same way.

To Seraphina, the reason was obvious.

Oryx still didn't have a deep understanding of spatial magic or its runes. Everything he cast was sustained by pure will, and an almost elementary understanding.

His spells were fast and dangerous, as befits that affinity by nature.

But simple.

On that continent, runic knowledge of space was practically non-existent. For most, this magic was an impossible nightmare to counter, and together with his other abilities, it made Oryx someone above his peers.

But for Seraphina, even as a doppelgänger and without the eyes of lust, those spells were basic structures, without layers, without protections, without measures to prevent interference.

So simple that breaking into them was almost instinctive, Oryx, in addition to his annoying ability to Escape, posed no danger to her.

KRRRAAWW !

The sound alerted her.

Another presence.

She turned her head and saw the condor descending toward her, with Noha riding on its back.

He wielded a long whip charged with a strange energy.

"Vector Gravitas...ugh." (Gravity Vector)

Gravity changed direction.

The condor lost control instantly. Its trajectory twisted unnaturally as Seraphina moved with luminous platforms, avoiding the whip by a narrow margin.

Even so, she could no longer avoid the overwhelming pain her body was feeling, there wasn't even room to waste it on pain-relieving spells...

But just then

'Damn it... All right! That's it. I know I'm the parallel thinker, but juggling so many things at once isn't easy.'

'Save your complaints. You're the only one who doesn't feel hellish pain. Or do you want to switch?'

'No. Aim to the left. The other one is almost here. It's all or nothing.'

BANG!

The mental exchange was instantaneous.

Seraphina fired at Oryx. He dodged as usual.

"Spatium Laxum", "Anchora Gravitatis." (Loose Space, Anchor of Gravity)

Seraphina cast two more spells, this time aiming them at the spot where Noha was standing.

At that moment, Oryx moved closer to him. He narrowly missed, but chained another movement to get even closer.

He thought he had arrived before the spells.

He was wrong.

Their lack of understanding of both spatial magic and gravity prevented them from comprehending what Seraphina had done. The spells were already active.

When Oryx reached Noha, he immediately sensed that something was wrong. The space around him seemed to have lost density, stretching and compressing erratically.

A deeply wrong feeling washed over him.

He grabbed Noha's shoulder and tried to escape using his affinity as usual.

Nothing happened.

He instantly changed his method and activated his other Skill.

"..."

WHUM—!

He managed to teleport.

"..."

But he appeared in the same place.

As if the jump had never happened.

Although the launch seemed to be aimed at Noha, the spell was focused on Oryx.

Seraphina didn't need to know if she would try to save him or just watch—either decision led to the same result.

That Noha could not prevent what was about to happen.

"Cadentia Forzata." (Forced Pull)

The attraction activated.

WHOOOM!

A brutal force began to pull everything toward the same point. Noha, Oryx, the summoned beasts... even the Mantis, which had already recovered and was returning to the attack.

Everyone was dragged along uncontrollably, bodies and magic losing stability at the same time.

Resistance seemed like a useless action.

Chapter 397: Decisive Actions

The pull wasn't clean.

It wasn't an orderly force or a simple vector.

It was gravitational chaos.

Space folded toward the point of attraction as if the world had decided to collapse in on itself.

...Everything was torn from its trajectory and thrown in the same direction.

WHOOOOOOM—!

Oryx felt his stomach twist.

There was no "up" or "down." Space stretched, compressed, and his perception—normally dilated—became erratic, saturated with contradictory signals.

Noha was no better off.

And their summonses struggled to stabilize: roars, flapping wings, brute force tearing through the air... all useless.

All absorbed.

They were dragged along as they collided with each other.

BROOMMM—!

CRASH—!

FWUUM—!

Amidst the distorted chaos—

Seraphina.

She wasn't fighting the force.

She was using it.

Her incomplete body was supported by platforms of light that were born and died in fractions of a second, created only to stabilize her, propel her, and disappear.

Everything had to be executed exactly as she had calculated.

Her single arm rose.

BANG—!

A shot of light pierced the chaos and severed one of the giant vines Noha had thrown out to anchor himself.

Noha growled.

"No—!"

Rocks and trees torn up along the way began to hit him indiscriminately.

CRASH!

Oryx, who had tried to use his ability too late, forced it again.

"..."

This time he moved.

But he appeared in the worst possible place: between two colossal stones about to crush him.

His teleportation was still failing.

He activated the space jump again—

And reappeared a few feet away from Seraphina, spinning out of control.

Their eyes met.

For a single moment.

BANG!

The light projectile shot out from Seraphina's hand.

Oryx raised a space barrier in front of him.

CRACK!

It worked.

But the impact threw him backwards, spinning violently, losing all reference for a brief moment.

Seraphina didn't let it pass.

"Lux—"

Her spell didn't quite form.

Her vision clouded for an instant.

Pain. Burning. The overload gnawing at her from within.

Blood floated, scattering in the gravitational field like suspended droplets.

'It's good enough.'

Confirmation came to him.

WHUM—!

The point of attraction collapsed in on itself.

The force disappeared in an instant.

The world reclaimed its weight.

THUUUD! CRASH—! BOOM!

Everything fell.

Bodies. Remnants of spells. Fragments of beasts. Compacted sand. Uprooted roots.

The impact shook the forest like a sharp, brutal blow.

Seraphina landed on her knees on a platform of light. Her breathing was heavy. Irregular. Blood continued to escape.

But she smiled.

As if she had been waiting for exactly this moment.

Oryx struggled to his feet, staggering, still disoriented.

Noha emerged from the wreckage, breathing heavily.

They both looked up.

Seraphina was already standing.

Mana swirled around her uncontrollably.

Dense. Violent. And in large quantities.

The ground began to crack.

The air vibrated.

And then—

CLANG! BANG! BRUM!

Coincidentally?

The clanging of weapons could be heard. Closer and closer. Too close.

At that moment, Seraphina opened her mouth.

"Thronus Spinarum Obscurarum."(X2) (Throne of Obscure Thorns)

The Seraphina who had left with Mitrass... was also there, they were the source of the noise.

"..."

Silence fell suddenly.

The silence lasted only a second. A second in which magicians of their level could have made more than one move.

But no one moved.

The pressure was absolute. The feeling of inevitability, overwhelming.

"UARG—!" "AHH!" "HUH—? AGH!" "PYAA!" "CRYAAA—!"

Confirmation came immediately. Black vines covered in thorns emerged and instantly grabbed everyone present, except for the two Seraphina.

They grabbed limbs. Necks. Torsos. Without warning.

Weakness struck first.

Then the dragging.

Everyone was violently pulled toward the same point.

No one was spared.

Not even the colossal worm that had avoided the previous dragging; it made the mistake of following them and was forcibly pulled out of the ground, caught by the thorny vines.

Oryx reacted instantly, forcing a release, trying to escape... even to rescue the others.

"Activa—! Cough! You won't escape this time!"

Seraphina had already anticipated this. The arrow's function was activated.

It was an improved version, which she planned to give to Alice later.

It had two divine runes.

'Attach'. 'Interrupt'.

The first was what prevented it from being removed, and the second was how to deal with him. Seraphina knew that abilities unrelated to affinities tended to resist or even ignore common magic.

That's why she could stop his affinity... but not his jumping Skill.

But with the divine runes, it was different.

"—!!!"

Everything Oryx tried to use was interrupted.

Nothing responded, no matter how fast his mind worked.

He continued to be dragged by the vines.

CRACK! PRACK! JISAAAA—! HIAAAA—!

The magic dragging them was brutal.

Probably the most powerful used that day.

A joint effort by both Seraphina, channeling overflowing and chaotic mana, perfectly aligned by the second parallel thought.

The vines of darkness and plant suppressed and weakened whoever they caught.

Breaking them was extremely difficult, even for tenth-rank beasts.

The thorns dug into the flesh, causing constant damage while further weakening them.

And it didn't end there.

The vines began to join together into a sphere of thorny vines.

Squeezing.

Compressing everyone together.

Continuous damage. Suppression. Drainage.

A slow and merciless execution.

"UGHH! Swallow this... let's see if you survive."

The doppelgänger fell to his knees, breathing heavily.

A brutal relief washed over his body: a huge amount of mana had been released all at once.

He looked at the ball of thorns.

Three enemies and the beasts trapped inside.

The colossal worm had been pulverized, crushed without margin for error.

Of all her options, this was the right one, as it caused continuous damage and would force those trapped inside to use up all their reserves if they wanted to survive.

An all or nothing gamble.

Her body couldn't take much more. And the original's situation wasn't good either, even if it was somewhat better than hers.

BROOMMM! CRRUUMM!!

Impacts from within.

Those trapped were trying to free themselves with everything they had.

But the black vines continued to spread, making the sphere denser, thicker.

The magic absorbed the mana from the attacks.

It was no coincidence that it had taken so long to conjure, even with the original's abilities and the mana reserves of both.

Even for her current temporary power, it was a very complex and difficult magical execution.

In fact, it was no simple feat, and it was so extraordinary that...

Affinity with Plants (+A) >>> Affinity with Plants (S)

Affinity with Darkness (+A) >>> Affinity with Darkness (S)

Even the world recognized it.

The battle was coming to an end.

If they survived, Seraphina was ready to finish them off without delay.

WAASSHK—

"Tsk!."

Both Seraphinas saw him at the same time.

Oryx appeared outside the ball of thorns.

It was not surprising. The arrow only interrupted him temporarily. There was a slight hope that he would believe, even for a moment, that he could not use his Skill until the end.

But his skill set was still problematic.

Even so, Oryx was torn apart. One of his arms was completely covered in blood.

And something else.

Before, he wore a necklace with a ruby bead around his neck. Now—it was gone.

Seraphina looked at the arrow stuck in him.

It was still there.

It was made of good material, which she had her father give to her. It was kept in the family vault and was a kind of family treasure, although for her it was simply the perfect material to hold divine runes, more than once.

It would withstand two more activations.

As soon as she saw Oryx, she took immediate action.

The doppelgänger, in the last stretch of her strength, lunged at him.

Oryx saw her.

His face twisted in pure terror. Seraphina was already a permanent shadow in his mind, and he didn't want her to get close.

SKRRRAAA—!GRRRAAAH!

But out of nowhere, the circumstances changed. A heavy roar shook the area.

At the same time, a brutal pressure fell upon the surroundings.

Seraphina reacted immediately.

She located the source.

A huge red panda was running in her direction.

Not toward her.

Towards the ball of thorns.

The aura it emanated—Soul Conversion. First rank.

An eleven-star beast.

For a moment, she thought it was a beast from Noha.

But—

[[no connection]]

Qetesh confirmed instantly: no connection to Noha.

Those who came from other worlds had limits on entry, but the inhabitants of this world did not.

That is why there were forbidden zones. That's why certain places were left untouched until the power was equalized; there were many soul conversion beasts everywhere.

They had entered its territory. Or maybe it was just bad luck, whatever it was, it seemed that the beast saw magic as a threat.

CRAAUGH!

The red panda attacked the sphere of thorns.

The vines, like the rest, tried to wrap around it, drag it down.

But it didn't work.

The beast was absurdly strong. Its defense, too.

It wouldn't let itself be restrained.

Its claws left deep gashes, tearing away layers of vines.

From one of those gashes, a hand emerged.

Covered with what looked like a glass glove. It bled purple.

Small compared to the panda and the sphere... but a string of light emerged from it.

It stretched out. And it wrapped itself around the red panda's neck.

The panda's movement stopped dead in its tracks.

A moment later—

GRAAAWW!

The beast intended to attack the area where the hand was coming from, with everything it had.

"Damn it... Saltu—."

But the doppelgänger didn't stand still.

It changed its target.

Instead of going after the elusive Oryx, it lunged at the red panda.

It wasn't fast enough, and before it could complete its throw.

BOOMM—!

The panda attacked with full force.

The roar shook the area. The earth trembled.

The shockwave even affected the doppelgänger.

'Shit.'

Seraphina, watching from a distance, understood immediately.

The attack had been effective. It didn't just open a breach:

it broke the magic.

The structure collapsed.

Mittrass was gone. Only his boots remained.

Seraphina wanted to believe that he was finally dead.

But Noha was still alive.

Conscious.

He was injured, but his body was covered—no, rather, his body now seemed crystallized, and his hand had even recovered. He even had two extra arms.

'Do it.'

Seraphina was decisive.

With an eleven-star beast on the scene, the situation had spiraled out of control.

'I understand.'

"Saltus Spatii!" (Spatial Leap)

The doppelgänger, on the verge of collapse, teleported.

Straight to the red panda.

More specifically—

Straight into its open mouth.

And was devoured in one bite.

Noha saw it.

He didn't understand everything that was going on. But he retreated.

He didn't control the red panda; his rank didn't allow it.

He had only forced it for a moment with his ability.

Before the beast turned on him, he distanced himself.

Then—

BOOMMMMMMM—!!!

The roar was absolute.

Noha looked back.

The red panda's head fell, brutally separated from its body.

A gigantic explosion had occurred inside its throat.

The doppelgänger had sacrificed herself.

It was the result of ninth metamorphosis statistics, and with a higher-range core, along with the fact that it had been detonated from within for greater effectiveness.

She decisively eliminated that variable, making one last use of that body that could no longer resist another moment.

"Enough is enough."

Noha was exhausted, mentally at his limit.

Two defensive artifacts and five beasts sacrificed just to survive the previous attack.

He couldn't drag this out any longer, and he was going to be decisive too.

Seraphina saw him.

She read the decision in his eyes.

Unlike her doppelgänger, she couldn't ignore the warnings her body was screaming.

But she had no choice.

She gritted her teeth.

She prepared to attack Noha, now fused with his crystal beast.

CRACK—!

The sound was sharp, a sound that represented a turning point.

And then she felt it—

Relief.

Overwhelming relief.

The relief her body had been demanding for a long time.

The reason—

The demonic core in her chest had broken.

A dagger had been thrust into it without her noticing.

The demonization ceased instantly. The relief made her weak, and her body was about to collapse.

It was one of Noha's trump cards: a quick, stealthy dagger.

Perhaps she didn't notice it because he had no intention of killing her.

Just to rip out the demonic core, something her body desperately wanted.

But at that moment, losing the demonization—

Was a death sentence.

Frossh!~

And Noha was also being decisive and didn't stop there, and immediately A gigantic glow flooded the area and headed in her direction.

Another attack. One of the things Noha should only use when cornered.

Seeing it, in that moment of weakness, Seraphina felt it—

Death approaching.

Absolutely.

Chapter 398: Suspension

"Am I going to die?"

When she saw that attack, that thought came to her; it seemed inevitable. It was such a strong and fast attack that, even with her perception enhanced by spells, it should have been unavoidable even at her best.

But she, for some reason, could see the attack slowly approaching her.

Now her strength had left her body, and she could hardly move it.

She felt the coldness of death approaching.

Seeing how slowly it was approaching, it seemed that this was what happened when one was on the verge of death.

She saw her life flash before her eyes.

Seraphina began to remember everything. Many images of many things came to mind: from the blurry, monotonous, gray days of her previous life,

how she lived many years in disconnection and denial, how she lived her life foolishly.

So foolishly that now she felt that a little effort on her part, a little initiative and courage, would have been enough to make everything different.

How, in the end, she left that world without having created any deep connections, not even with those who were always with her and supported her.

And whenever she remembered it, it always translated into one word...

regret.

She lived her first life in such a way that it was really the only word that came to mind: many years summed up so simply and dryly.

On the other hand, since she was reincarnated, in what she thought was her new beginning, it was an abrupt contrast.

The images that came from this one seemed numerous, and the things she could think of about this one were overwhelmingly more.

The few years she had been here were—

[Hmm, are you really doing that? Isn't it too cliché?... Does that nonsense about internal introspection ending in a mysterious burst of power really work? Mmm... Will it work? ah! Now that I think about it, William did it once or twice, didn't he?]

At that moment, as she remembered so many things, this small instant that seemed like an eternity was abruptly interrupted by an unexpected voice.

At some point, someone had appeared right in front of her; it was someone she recognized: her alternate self, the aged Seraphina.

'What... suddenly... wait, did everything really stop?— don't tell me...'

Seraphina felt a sense of mental clarity again and noticed that everything around her had literally frozen.

In that brief moment, time seemed to have stopped completely. No, it was still flowing, but so slowly that it seemed to be standing still.

It didn't seem to be a case of seeing her life flash before her eyes, and it was at that moment that a possibility arose in her mind.

[What? Don't be an idiot. Do you think I left some kind of hidden trick that would help you in a critical moment?]

'No?'

[Of course not. Do you think you're some cliché protagonist like William or something? What do you want, a deus ex machina? Well, unfortunately, that's not going to happen. Tsk! Thinking you're the protagonist or something... how silly... the same silliness that got me into so much trouble.]

'...Then what is this?'

[Tsk, how should I know? Maybe you screwed up your brain by using such powerful demonic cores together with mind-enhancing magic.]

'...And you?'

[Mmm... I don't know... Maybe it's a memory or something your alternate self left behind, or maybe you're just hallucinating, I honestly think it's the latter].

'...If so, why you?'

[Who knows. ^_(\u0322)_/^-...Maybe you're seeing me because you wanted to hear some wise words or some nonsense about life or existence, or something to keep you going, from a figure of great influence on you; but I'm not going to say any of that motivational crap.]

'...'

[What do you want me to say? I know that clichéd words and nonsense don't work with us... Hmm, yeah, I don't think it'll work, but since I'm here, I'll give it a try. Let's see... I am you, but you'll never be like me. You spoiled bastard, you haven't lost anything yet.]

'...?'

[Yeah, I didn't connect the ideas there... but really, when I think about it, it pisses me off a little... No, it pisses me off a lot. I know who we are is based on the experiences we have, but I feel like you're being too soft to be me; you lack character.]

'Wait! Isn't this one of those things again? Like that fucking mirror where I saw you last time? You're not even the real one, are you?'

[Huh? Who knows?... But you can't deny that your way of life has a lot to be criticized, especially if it's me, right? Who else but me has the moral superiority to insult you a little? Especially when you look like an idiot seeking outside help right now.]

'Damn it.'

[Oh! Now that I think about it, why don't you ask Aeloria for help? You know, sometimes when idiots are about to die, they ask for divine help, and sometimes it works. Although you'll have to pay a certain price... well, that is if that bitch hears you in time, huehue~.]

'I don't want to listen to any more nonsense if you're not going to do anything.'

[Tsk. Are you going to start whining like a little girl? Well, since you asked, I'll do something... Okay, it will take a while, since we are in a time of near stagnation, but help will arrive before that happens.]

'?'

Seraphina didn't understand anything that was suddenly happening or what the old woman Seraphina was talking about, who definitely didn't seem like an illusion or anything like that.

She also noticed that she couldn't move and was stuck like everything else; the only one who seemed to be moving freely was the old woman.

She really had a lot of questions about what was going on, to the point that it wasn't even a priority to think about how the old woman was reading her thoughts.

And the latter didn't seem to care about Seraphina's doubts and continued talking.

[But it won't be easy. That bastard Noha has a Profound Golden Frog. Those things can only attack once in their lifetime before they die, but their attacks are no joke. That could even kill someone on the first soul conversion.]

'...What the hell?.'

[Small details. Anyway, since it'll take a while, why don't we talk? It's not that I want to insult you or anything, it just comes naturally. I mean, put yourself in my shoes: how do you think I would feel when I saw you give up so easily in the face of death and start thinking nonsense? Was there even a plan there? Was everything I taught you with my memories in vain?]

'...'

[I mean, you're privileged. Thanks to me, you're avoiding so many things. You haven't fallen into despair. You haven't felt that feeling of wanting death but not being able to get it, and when you can finally claim it, avoiding it like the plague because that would just be the easy way out.]

'...'

[Looking at you, I realize how different we are. Obviously, you don't want to die, but you just stand there doing nothing, waiting for your death.]

'I'm not waiting for it, it's just that there was nothing I could do—'

Seraphina tried to defend herself, but the old woman seemed uninterested in excuses and interrupted her.

[Yes, it's true. Throughout my life, I had many different interactions with death: I came to desire it, to seek it out; I also hated it, challenged it, fought against it. I did many things in the face of death, but it was never with the mindset you have now. If I didn't want to die, I didn't, period.]

'What nonsense is that?'

[Hm, it's not nonsense. It was simply the way I was, what the experiences I had led me to achieve. You, on the other hand... the experiences you've had led you to a point I never reached...Wow, that sounded great. Didn't you want some philosophical garbage before you died? There you go, swallow it and die happy listening to my wise words.]

'Who wants something like that? Seriously, what the hell is this...?'

[You're asking the wrong person. Anyway, besides that, I'm going to tell you one more thing that you seem to be forgetting: if you die here, eventually the girls you care so much about will follow you.]

'Huh? No, what does that have to—?'

[Think about it. Yes, it's true. Each one is a strong woman who will go far on her own and doesn't need someone to depend on. you've always wanted them to be that way in case you die like now, and in fact, you did well.]

'Then what—?'

[[But so what? Being strong and independent isn't enough. Eventually, they'll be swept away by the flow of fate. Being born at the beginning of the age of the gods and having that kind of half-baked potential is nothing more than a death sentence, at best.]

"No... they—"

"Pfff, you really hadn't thought about it? Do you really think that way? Isn't that just vain self-deception so you can die without remorse?"

'...'

[What a joke, and you know it. In fact, because of what you've done, it's more likely that they'll last even less than expected. I mean that's why you started this pointless fight isn't it, because it was all going to shit without you noticing, plus you didn't really do anything but provoke them].

'...ugh!'

[Well, maybe with luck, your fate will intertwine with Willian's again, dodge what's to come...yeah, maybe with your damn luck, you'll get a little further].

'...'

[But again, that's not enough, and in fact they will attract even more attention from the gods, and they will squeeze them until they are no longer useful to them. Maybe, just maybe, one of them will live to be old because one of those bastards decided it was more fruitful to squeeze her dry.]

'...'

[See? That's how fucked up this whole thing is. Realistically, you're not even the important part; the important part is the legacy of lust that isolates you and those around you from all that crap. Without that, as long as you're not a god, it's inevitable, no matter how capable, independent, or talented you are. Being that way, rather, will be your downfall.]

'...'

[Hue~ Dying without regrets, that's something that won't happen. If you're going to die, it will be knowing the consequences and everything else. Maybe that's why I'm here. No motivation, no encouraging words: just the harsh reality of what will happen, you son of a bitch.]

'So what? You talkative bastard, what do you want me to do? My body is shattered after using that core, to the point that it can't move. The flow of mana destroyed my mana channels, and I don't even feel like I can move. The tiny amount I have left after the core was destroyed is useless... what do you really expect me to do?'