

[Adam POV]

By Makarov's orders, his son, Ivan Dreyar had been excommunicated from the guild in a rather public manner. The reasons behind this decision went beyond Ivan's actions against me, which one could arguably say were some of the strongest points for his ex-communication.

Ivan had a history of doing terrible things. Not terrible enough to warrant any form of law enforcement to target him, but enough to make everybody know he was an evil person.

His attack on me had been nothing but the last straw for the old man.

Good riddance.

I had tolerated Ivan all this time for the sole reason that I didn't want to deny Laxus of the greatness he was supposed to get. That Lacrima was the only good thing his father would ever do for him.

"I'm sorry for what happened," Makarov said softly, as he leaned his aged frame gently against the wall beside me, his wrinkled hand clenching weakly in regret.

I looked into his eyes, seeing in them an ocean of guilt and remorse, his face and demeanor were a stark contrast to what was happening around us.

Around, ignoring the Master and me, the guild members roared in laughter and clinked their mugs together, as music, loud and raucous, blared in the air.

"It's all right," I said with a shrug. "You didn't attack me. And besides, he was never a real threat, to begin with."

Makarov's eyes met mine and then he smiled, an amused quirk of his lips that caused a few of the wrinkles around his eyes to crinkle. "Gildarts told me you managed to defeat him without much difficulty while being exhausted."

"I could've ended the fight with the first strike, but that would've also ended his life," I replied, briefly glancing at my Zanpakuto which was resting on my waist inside its sheath. "I didn't want to kill him... so I had to rely on other avenues to take him down."

Makarov's eyes drifted down to my Zanpakuto before turning back to me. "Those who are strong have the ability to decide the tides of a battle, thanks to this, my foolish son lives. I want you to know, son, if you ever find yourself against an enemy you can't spare without risking your life, don't hesitate to strike with all you got."

My eyes widened in surprise at his response. His words hung heavily in the air, the implications of them sinking in slowly.

"I know that," I replied. I knew that very well. The only reason Ivan lived was because I had been strong enough to allow myself the luxury of letting him live.

I also knew that wouldn't always be the case.

At my reaction, Makarov smiled, this time giving me his trademark grandfatherly smile. "You're a good kid, Adam. You put others before you, you protect their feelings without expecting anything in return, and for that, I'm proud to have you as one of my children."

I studied the old man's gaze for a moment, and a strange understanding seemed to pass between us. He knew... that I had spared Ivan not out of the goodness of my heart, but because I hadn't wanted to hurt him or Laxus by doing so.

I couldn't tell how he had come to figure this out. But he had.

I looked at Makarov with newfound respect, my mouth curved into an amused smile. "You are frighteningly perceptive, gramps," I said, giving his arm a light pat.

He smiled in gentle acknowledgment, his eyes twinkling with understanding. "You don't get to my age being clueless, brat."

Before I could say another word, a loud sound in the kitchen caught my attention.

Turning around, I saw Gildarts step out of the kitchen, his hulking frame silhouetted by the now broken doorway and his arms laden with two overflowing mugs of beer. His face was split into an enormous smile.

Gildarts threw his hands in the air, a huge grin spreading across his face. "Thanks for the party brat!" His booming voice filled the room, reverberating off the walls and ceiling.

I smiled, as the Master and I stifled a chuckle.

Gildarts had tried to have me pay for this party as a celebration of my excellent work; what he didn't know was I had convinced Makarov to bill him instead.

"Everything here it's yours, enjoy!" I replied, making the old man beside me choke between chuckles.

Gildarts, being too drunk and happy to notice what was going on, moved into the guild's hall to continue partying and drinking. Drinking his wallet dry.

Smiling, I turned my gaze to the old master, who was still chuckling under his breath, and felt a mischievous smirk tug at my lips. "I wonder if messing with him will ever get old?"

"I don't think so," Makarov wheezed.

I chuckled.

The reason why Gildarts was so easy to mess with was because no one before had actually dared to mess with him, which in turn had made him an easy target for whoever was willing to give it a try.

It also helped that Makarov loved messing with him, which granted me a powerful ally in this quest of mine.

"Well, as much as I enjoy seeing everyone drink Gildarts' checking account, I'm tired," I said, before jumping off my seat. "I'm off to sleep, see ya later, gramps."

Taking a deep breath, I pushed away from the table I had been sitting on and rose from my chair. The wooden legs squeaked against the floor. "Well, as much as I enjoy seeing everyone drink away Gildarts' checking account," I said with a wry smirk, "I'm tired. I'm off to sleep, see ya later, gramps."

The next morning as I was having some breakfast in my apartment, I heard the painful scream of a man in the distance that had just figured out he had to pay for something he hadn't expected to pay.

At this, a satisfied grin spread across my face as I finished the last few bites of my breakfast. Ready to take another job at the guild, I got up from the kitchen table, and walked to the door.

However, before I could open the door, three loud knocks echoed through my home.

And seeing as their energy was new to me, I couldn't figure out who was behind the door.

Feeling no ill intent from whoever had come to visit me, I opened the door, only to find Laxus behind, his eyes sunken and dull, his face pale and drawn.

He seemed exhausted as if he hadn't slept in days.

"What brings you here, Laxus?" I asked, already knowing why he was here.

Laxus stood in front of me, his arms crossed and jaw clenched tight. His face was expressionless but his eyes drilled into mine, searching for answers. "Is it true?" he said, his voice dull and hollow.

Just a few days ago he was but a happy kid, who was always elated to talk with me because I was the only other kid his age in the guild. Now, in the blink of an eye, I see nothing but the beginning of what led him to the Thunder Palace events.

"That your father tried to kill me?" I replied, deciding the best thing I could offer him was my honesty. "Yes."

Lexus glared at me, his fists clenched at his sides. "I don't believe you! Liar!"

"It's not a matter of whether you believe me or not," I started, letting out a sigh. "You heard what I said and then called me a liar. Your mind may not want to accept these revelations. But inside you there's a voice saying... accept it, it's the truth."

Aizen's words fit this situation like Cinderella's glass slipper.

A single tear fell down Lexus' face, but his expression never changed. "That's not true," he repeated, his shoulders shaking. "That's not true!"

I sighed, taking a step forward. "Repeating that won't change the reality of things, Lexus. Soon you'll understand, time will help."

Lexus's head snapped up, his eyes burning with anger, sadness, and doubt. "My dad wouldn't hurt anyone!" his voice raised an octave. "He's strict... but he's not a bad guy..."

"I feel sorry about how you feel," I replied, looking at him. "I know you can't accept what happened, and that's okay. It's only

natural for you to refuse what I'm saying. Most people can only accept the truths that are comfortable for them."

Lexus turned away from me, refusing to meet my gaze. His face twisted in a grimace.

I let out a deep sigh and brushed past Lexus, our shoulders grazing each other's as I said, "Go ask your grandfather or Gildarts. They'll tell you the same."

Lexus stood in front of my door as I walked, motionless, his eyes wide. Before suddenly, he lunged forward, his mouth agape and voice booming through the hallway like thunder as he yelled, "Lightning Dragon's Breakdown Fist!"

I kept walking, hearing the crackling sound of his tiny fist smacking against my back while doing nothing. I knew he was lashing out, trying to blame anyone for what had happened.

Just as I knew he lacked the strength to inflict any real damage, so I decided the best path to take was to ignore his attack.

Leaving the shocked Lexus behind as I continued walking confidently, without even looking at him. "If you wish to fight me, Lexus," I said, my voice low and steady, "you must become much more powerful than you are now."

With that said, I left my apartment complex with a bitter feeling in my mouth.

I could only hope he would take my advice and talk with Makarov or Gildarts about his father. Sometimes honesty was the best policy, even when it didn't feel like it was.

On another note, I was surprised he already had a dragon-slaying attack under his belt. He had acquired the Lacrima less than a week ago, and he was already showing Dragon Slaying attacks.

Perhaps it was something that came naturally to all Dragon Slayers from the second generation.

I sighed, pushing those thoughts aside before making haste to the guild. I wanted a job, preferably a long one.