

Fate/Bonds Beyond Humanity

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82- All Sort of Deliberations

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After a few days without incidents, Azazel could say for certain that it was all just the calm before the storm.

Throughout the ages the Cadre remembered having that feeling several times in his life, and not just because he was about to enter in an extremely important meeting that would define plans which could or could not lead to the end of the world.

Much less the intel from the Hero Faction's most recent incursion on Fuyuki and how they had attempted to kidnap his friend and lab partner. Nor the information they unwillingly gave by failing said kidnapping.

Even as things slowed down, there was an edge and doubt because of what the supposed 'King of Heroes' told everyone about his reasons to kidnap Shirou. The redhead himself affirmed that it sounded like something his sister would do and that they should be on guard because 'Gilgamesh' had no reason to lie.

'The real Gilgamesh wouldn't dance around things like that. When that man wanted something... Except when he was younger but even then he was more prudent. And powerful.' Shaking his head, Azazel left the past behind to focus on the future. A very imminent future. 'Someone attacking a new power block isn't surprising. If anything it is a reminder that even if the Three Factions are allied, our standing in the world is shaky at best.' The Governor General reminded himself as the two women with him opened the door for a modest apartment with an underground installation. 'But to attack during the Youth Gathering Tournament is expected. Attacking during a match? That is bold. It implies an attack in the Underworld and on the participants in another dimension.' A waste in his opinion but he didn't know exactly what the Old Satan Faction was planning. 'Why now?'

The fact said attacks hadn't happened yet, just small skirmishes, told the Cadre that the Khaos Brigade had to be planning something and it had to be something big as no other descendant of the Original Maous made an appearance so far.

'Not even Katerea showed her face again and she definitely is a woman who likes revenge. She certainly wanted Serafall's head so coming after my neck should be a given.' Azazel didn't want to kill a pretty woman like that but it wouldn't be the first time. 'Certainly it would be for the best to dispatch her without involving Serafall. I still can't believe what they are suggesting. For their image it is a good idea but if they lose then it is going to backfire hard.'

Wearing a suit, the same one he used for teaching, the man ventured inside the Grigori HQ in Fuyuki. It was one of the Gremory buildings donated for their operations and the place which housed not only an extra lab for him but a barracks for his troops.

Not that there were many to house, the main garrison in Fuyuki shared space with devils for diplomacy's sake and the ones in that 'HQ' were just a token force to take care of the place since even his lab there wasn't that important.

The 'good stuff' as Azazel himself joked about, was either in his house or the lab in Kuoh but the man liked to leave something on the side to work whenever a meeting ended too soon or he was particularly bored during those.

Unfortunately he didn't have time to be bored over the last few days. "Are we on schedule?"

His secretary, and one of his bodyguards even if they were several times weaker than himself, nodded before responding. "We still have ten minutes, Lord Azazel."

"Then we are about to start." The Cadre replied already knowing he would be the last one to arrive. The other three had too many reasons to get there early. "Well, wish me luck." He opened the double doors for a room with a computer, small desk and notes on one side and a huge table with a single chair on the other. "You know what to do."

"Nobody comes five meters close to the doors." His first bodyguard, a woman with black hair like himself and same colored eyes said first. She had a youthful disposition which contrasted nicely with her mature appearance.

"And anything happens, we warn you immediately." His secretary, and the mother of the first woman, added later. Her features were more striking than her daughter's and she looked to be the serious one of the pair.

"Good girls." He complimented before closing the door and losing his smirk. His posture also grew more rigid as he approached the bigger table which had the shape of diamond and several magic circles spread over the wood which was made from a very specific type of oak. "Huff, today is going to be one of those meetings, isn't it?"

It wasn't that he had anything against who was participating but unfortunately Michael wasn't one of them, it would be Gabriel. While usually he loved to talk with his sister, Heaven's Diva as some loved to call her and he wholeheartedly agreed, the problem was the other side of the meeting.

'At least Sirzechs is backing me up with Serafall.' Remembering the first time he had to deal with the two women by himself made him let out a sigh. 'Otherwise nothing was going to get done.'

Gabriel was free of fault on that as she was just her usual angelic self; full of kindness, piety, just pleasing to be around, a woman who would freely forgive the worst sinner on the planet so long they demonstrated real remorse.

Serafall, for reasons neither the Cadre nor the Maous nor the nobles or even her sister fully understood, hated Gabriel. Hated beyond any other devil ever did and even more than any

ever hated God. The new Leviathan just declared the Seraph as her rival one day out of the blue, as far as everyone was concerned, even before they met.

She also attempted to upstage Azazel's sister at every turn which the taller woman just found endearing which only made the former Heiress of Sitri more furious in turn confusing the Seraph.

All that crossed Azazel's mind as he slowly, at a snail's pace if not even slower than that, approached the huge table. 'I am not late yet.' He reassured himself, hoping that Sirzechs had somehow controlled his coworker by the time he sat down. 'Just one more minute. Just two more minutes. Three more minutes and it will be time to begin.'

Then he felt his cellphone vibrate, quickly opening it up to read; *I know you are there. Get into the meeting.* From Sirzechs. Shaking his head, Azazel gently pulled his chair before another message arrived; *NOW*

"Sheesh. That bad, huh?" Not willing to waste any more time the man jumped in his chair and slammed the magic circle on the table.

A red, gold and purple circuit-like pattern flowed around the wood, until the mana spread around four cardinal points on the diamond, one of which was in front of him. Soon two more magic circles began to shine in it, one demonic red and the other angelic gold. The former had two symbols of it, Lucifer's and Leviathan's, while the latter displayed a cross.

From them mana poured in front of those positions and images similar to holograms flicked into life.

And with them came sound. *-just one match. Everyone is gonna love it!* Serafall's voice, usually melodious, carried a tone of raw ferocity.

On the opposite side of the desk a truly melodious voice, one Azazel missed almost every day since his fall, replied as kindly as possible. *Uhh, but aren't teams necessary for Rating Games. I still don't have a single Brave Saint.*

Gabriel once received the title of the Most Beautiful in Heaven and as far as anyone was concerned she still retained that honor with ease. With bright curly blonde hair which went past her lower back, eyes that looked like two crystal pools and a voluptuous body proportionally perfect she was pretty much unmatched.

Even her long robes and armor covered her half her torso and shoulders couldn't hide her figure. They were also similar to Michael's but where the man had red, his sister had a darker tone of yellow to match with gold.

Adding to that there was an air of innocence that made it extremely hard for anyone to get angry with her.

Anyone but Serafall. *It will be fair! Just the two of us ducking it out!*

A tilt of Gabriel's head, one that could stop a mortal man's heart with her loveliness, showed her confusion. *But the purpose of those wasn't to show teamwork?*

Yeah, it is part of that but also a chance to show our power.

Ah, yes. I forgot devils cared about that. Gabriel nodded to herself proudly at remembering that fact.

Then there was a moment of silence before Serafall asked again. *Are we having our fight or what?*

But I don't like fighting.

My, my, Serafall. Maybe you should give Lady Gabriel some time to make a deck. While also working in your peerage. How many Pieces you have again? None? You don't say. Sirzechs' words earned him a look of betrayal but the man wasn't fazed. Indeed his hologram turned to Azazel with a fake smile that hid a silent fury. 'You left me with this, help me NOW!'

'Calling me for an excuse to stop your friend isn't a good look, you know?' Azazel caught on to the real meaning behind Sirzechs' actions and chuckled loudly he got everyone's attention. "Good night, everyone! Sorry if it took me too long, I had papers to grade."

Immediately all Gabriel's attention focused on him. *Ah, Azazel-oniichan, it is great to see you!*

With a hand on his chest, the Cadre almost fell from his chair. 'Onii-chan? Since when does she call me that? Be still my beating heart! I know we can't die from heart attacks but that was a close call.'

While the Governor General recovered from his shock, his sister turned to the devil pair, one which was pouting with a glare at the reaction Gabriel could incite on men effortlessly while the other just smiled as he could understand the other man's happiness in that moment..

Did I say it wrong?

No, you said it correctly. The redhead informed but could see Serafall was about to try and start something again, fighting back a sigh as he shouldn't even be in that meeting.

However the Minister of Foreign Affairs, also known as Serafall Leviathan, was too aggressive with her heavenly counterpart. *I thought you were the older sister.*

What about it? Michael likes it and I thought Azazel would too.

"Yeah, thanks Gabriel. I am flattered you still consider me part of the family."

Of course.

But that is how you-

It is still applicable. Sirzechs said quickly even as Serafall glared at him for his supposed second betrayal. Considering she was making extra work for him, consequently affecting the time with his family, he would brush that aside and keep peace no matter how angry his friend grew. *So now that Azazel is here, we can begin.*

All humor vanished and even Serafall's attitude shifted from confrontational to worried. *This is the last one, right? The attack is going to be on Rias and Diodora's match so after we stop that we probably won't have to worry about the Old Satan Faction for a while.*

"Depends on how much they will commit to it and how well we can deflect said attack. If it does indeed happen." Azazel reminded everyone their intel was technically uncertain.

Only for Sirzechs to shake his head. *Either case we have to expect the worst and be prepared. Ajuka already set up the evacuation spells and Falbium organized the army for when things go down.*

"If things go down. And supposing we can't solve everything ourselves."

We need to keep the enemy outside of Lilith or the people in the city can be caught in the crossfire. Better have troops positioned and ready than not having them and cry about it later. Serafall reminded the man who nodded, admitting the precaution was fair.

They all heard a soft sigh from Gabriel whose expression was still the image of perfection even when caring a deep sadness. *It is always awful when the innocent suffer because of unnecessary violence.* She turned to the devils and lowered her head. *Also I apologize we can't help more with the situation. Our hands are really tied.*

It isn't your fault, Lady Gabriel. If anything we should be glad the problem with the Church is technically smaller than ours. Sirzechs spoke quickly to not give Serafall the chance of saying the same thing but more aggressively. *Protests and refusing to help us, devils, were always something expected.*

Just be glad it isn't another Scism. Serafall still managed to get the word in with both men holding back a flinch.

Fortunately for all sides, Gabriel was unable to feel malice in her words. *I wholeheartedly agree, Serafall. Indeed even if most of our Exorcists are refusing to work in cooperation with or in the Underworld at least they aren't trying to create new branches in our Church.* Her beautiful smile was like a ray of sunshine that made the black haired woman grit her teeth. *Now I can truly understand Father's frustration when it happened the first time. Ah~ I sure hope Michael finds some sort of solution for this problem but it isn't likely to happen any time soon.*

The biggest setback of the Church, the whole institution that involved several branches and many forms of worship for the same being, over the last few centuries wasn't a crisis of Faith but a question of principles.

Many in the Church found themselves questioning the decision of allying with devils who were their ancient enemies. Surely nobody was questioning God, yet, but whispers had already started. Fortunately a lot of deflection could be made by claiming that God loved all Creation.

However devils weren't His creations, that was already properly documented in several forms and many in the Church who knew the existence of angels found themselves questioning why embrace an enemy that could stab them in the back later.

The fact God was dead didn't help matters and that was a can of worms nobody needed opened any time soon.

'We need to get Medusa on Heaven's Throne. Or anyone else for that matter.' Azazel agreed with Michael that it was the best solution. Once there was someone enacting Miracles and properly guiding Heaven then things would get much easier. 'But she isn't ready and nobody else is trustworthy.'

Like I said, it isn't your fault, Lady Gabriel. Sirzechs didn't need to rush anymore, even Serafall knew how dangerous it was if some sect of the Church got radicalized and tried to restart the Great War. *We will make due with what we can. Besides, Michael allowed his Ace to cooperate with us so you are trying to do your part.*

Irina! How has she been? I was so happy when she became an angel but a bit sad Michael Reincarnated her first. Her smile regained some life as she spoke of someone dear before her eyes gained a more serious light. *Also, Sirzechs, I already said you don't need to call me 'Lady' or stuff like that. We are all equals here, please, just Gabriel is fine.*

"Yeah, Sirzechs. Any reason why my sister gets special treatment while I am just 'good old Azazel'?"

Yes! We are all friends here, aren't we?

Allies at best. Was Serafall's weak protest but even she wouldn't fight much on that.

Which amused Sirzechs to no end. *Fufufufu, apologies, Lady Gabriel-* Seeing her pout, he amended quickly. *Gabriel. It is just my upbringing. You know how it is.* She nodded with satisfaction and he did the same in turn before his expression grew serious. *However Serafall was right, this is the last time we have to worry about this... urgent meetings. Next ones will be of a more formal setting.*

"Hopefully." Honestly Azazel wasn't optimistic their situation would improve much after the attack in question. "Like we discussed many times before, it depends on the damage we do to them and how little they do to us."

Thanks again for your support and the extra help with the guests. Back in her role as Foreign Affairs Minister, Serafall lowered her head in gratitude with a serious expression. *But I think I need to remind you that this time we, the Satans, should be the ones facing the

Old Satan Faction.* Her eyes turned sharp and one of the four top generals of the Underworld Civil War was front and center in the meeting. *We must show our people, our enemies and our potential allies that we are the legitimate rulers. That we have the power to keep our thrones.*

So no more risking your life because it is 'less valuable', 'kay?' Sirzechs asked playfully.

Gabriel pouted at hearing that. *Azazel, please don't say things like that about yourself. I would be really sad if you died.*

"Hey, hey, hey. I won't, Gabriel, I won't. You know me! I am Azazel, the Magnificent!!"

Some chuckles and giggles escaped the devils but it was short as Leviathan spoke once again. *About the matter of guests... are we sure we should still be inviting gods?*

This time Gabriel was the first to reply. *It would be odd if they suddenly weren't invited to the event.* Her expression was collected and calm despite being full of compassion. *Those that show up will have to be kept away from the fighting. Since they are VIPs, it will be easy to convince them to be careful.*

Unless gods of War and Violence decide to pop up. Part of Serafall just wanted to be contrarian. The other raised a fair point. *Those ones really could never say no to a fight.*

Some showed up at first, curious about Rating Games. Sirzechs reminded them all. *But most of them found the matches a bit too dull.*

"I swear those guys won't have fun unless someone loses their head." Azazel pointed out with a chuckle before giving a thumbs up. "But worry not my sister and friends, Azazel is on the case."

Ohh~ What did you do, Azazel-oniichan?

"What my dear sister? I sent out the invites pretty much saying Rias' victory is guaranteed and the match will be one-sided and boring."

That is why you wanted to take over the invitations. Sirzechs sounded impressed. *Won't stop everyone from coming but the more hotblooded gods certainly will find the whole affair worthless. Well done.*

"And then we claim the attack caught us by surprise."

The Seraph shook her head fervently. *Lying is wrong, Azazel.* She was one of the angels that avoided speaking about her Father's demise at all cost both out of principle and because she couldn't hide the truth even if she tried.

It could be said it was in her nature to be Honest.

“Don’t worry, don’t worry, Heaven won’t have to lift a finger.” He held a fist to his chest and lowered his head theatrically. “Leave it all to your brother, Gabriel. Technically I am not telling a single lie; Rias’ victory is pretty much secured, Diodora’s side is sort of weak. And we technically did discover the attack... just before the attack itself because of a happy coincidence.” To mollify her sense of duty even more, he added. “So long nobody asks for a specific timetable there won’t be a single lie and nobody ever asks for those.”

I mean... you are correct in a way.

“Great! I also nudged some gods to partake just to be safe.”

Azazel, we didn’t agree on that. Lucifer pointed out with a small drop of annoyance.

But we do need some gods around to help secure our alliances. Serafall reminded her friend with a frown. *We can only hope he picked good ones.*

Snapping his fingers in triumph, the Governor General said. “Just some friends, those really interested in the Reincarnation System and the ones who wouldn’t mind helping in a pinch.” Then his eyes shone with a dangerous edge. “Also the ones who see the Khaos Brigade as a problem and wouldn’t mind doing something about it.”

And have no idea they are technically walking into a trap?

 Serafall asked out loud and the Governor General laughed. *Azazel, are you sure this is a good idea?*

“Relax. I have everything under control.” As to say he was the only one in trouble if anyone came knocking which he doubted they would. “I picked good gods to help us out. Don’t worry.”

‘Good gods’, hmm. Sirzechs voiced his thoughts and both devils found those words very amusing. *Still, it will be a risk if they end up hurt. Perhaps, if they are so trustworthy, we should tell them.* His blue eyes grew more focused and gained a red tint that could be seen even on the hologram. *Or do you suspect some of them are members of the Khaos Brigade?*

Azazel immediately shook his head. “Not taking that risk, not this time. If the Old Satan Faction has any card on their sleeve, I won’t be the one giving them more chips on the table.” He taped his own table twice. “Couldn’t get any god of Justice to help us out but the ones I get to come for sure... we will have them in our corner. None of them likes actions that involve innocents.”

Then it won’t be much of a problem warning them. Gabriel commented with a smile before it changed to a pensive pout. *However that would mean we should warn everyone and lose the element of surprise? What if there is a spy?*

“Odds are small, sister.”

Sirzechs nodded towards the angel. *I agree with Gabriel.* They all could see her shining when her name was said by itself and Lucifer felt oddly proud. *Besides a few trustworthy

allies, we must move in secrecy. If the wrong soldier hears what we know, or worse, a spy, the consequences could be catastrophic.*

Clicking her tongue, Serafall eventually said. *Yeah, I agree as well.* Very begrudgingly considering that was still Gabriel's suggestion. *We haven't even told Diodora and he is one of the competitors.*

"You two just don't care because your sisters are already in the know." Azazel called out without hesitation and found both Satans avoiding his eyes. "Hah! Knew it!" He kept his eyes on the two while saying. "If you guys think it is safe not informing Diodora and the Astaroth Clan that is fine by me."

Should we call Maou Beelzebub and ask him? They are family, correct?

The Seraph asked out loud to no one specific.

Serafall basically jumped to reply. *He said to not worry about it. Both him and Ria-tan are going to be inside the pocket dimension which is in the Dimensional Gap. Unless Great Red suddenly decides to go bananas, they are cool.*

I sadly must remind everyone Ophis is involved with the Khaos Brigade. Gabriel kept her tone even despite the expression of concern.

Inside the ever expanding Dimensional Gap even the Ouroboros Dragon can't just find our arenas. Not unless she expands her conscience and picks a fight with Great Red. Sirzechs pointed out proudly over his people's achievement.

Yet the Seraph felt she had to insist. *Perhaps they can with a signal of some sort? Apologies if I am being rude but dealing with young Rias and young Diodora would be a huge blow against you rather personally.*

It is fine, thank you for your concern. Since the worry was about his sister, Sirzechs was more than happy to indulge his ally. *But you won't have to worry, we wouldn't risk the next generation with faulty Rating Game arenas. Besides, there is a reason why we have a specific stadium for each game and they aren't just teleported from random magic circles.* The redhead then went on a small tangent explaining the spells and runes involved in fine detail that had Gabriel nodding once in a while. *In short, since the Dimensional Gap is so big we have the Rating Game arenas connected to their respective stadiums almost like making a tunnel. Obviously entering that tunnel from the sides is... well, we certainly could if we found the tunnel in question or just the pocket dimension itself.*

Which would still involve searching the infinity of the Dimensional Gap. Serafall pointed out bitterly. *Are you satisfied, Gabriel of the Seraph?*

Of course! I am glad you all thought of everything. With a secure system like that, I am sure one day our Brave Saints will be competing with devils in no time.

Seeing a chance, Serafall pounced. *Then we should-*

Only for Azazel to interrupt. "We still need to worry about the stadium itself." The Cadre reminded them all. "Unlike the pocket dimension, that one is stationary and everybody knows where Lilith is at this point. Now, I know you are coordinating with Shemhazai to get some of our men from the Vault of Prosperity but what about you guys? Moving a lot of troops without sounding an alarm is bound to raise eyebrows."

Without a shadow of a doubt. That is why it is such a good thing devils can have their peerages follow them everywhere. Sirzechs replied with a confident smirk. *Which is why certain members of the Pillars have VIP boxes in certain stadiums and receive special invitations.*

Loyalty was something to always be fostered but also a resource to be utilized at every opportunity. And the Four Maous did their best to play the appropriate cards whenever they saw fit, including calling upon certain people who were fighting with them ever since the civil war.

Those were usually unshakably loyal, members of their former Clans and Lords of small noble houses who owed their positions to the current regime. Sure even those who surrendered shared some privileges but only those who had been loyal from the beginning gained a greater degree of trust.

Trust enough to get a secret message that would insist they keep the younger members of their Clans at home while suggesting the older, stronger and experienced warriors could enjoy a day of fun.

If nothing happened, they all could say it was just a 'veterans' day out where they traded stories and watched a show. If something happened, the next generation would be safe inside fortified castles while the warriors would be in the thick of the action even before it began.

So you are warning some people. Gabriel nodded in realization.

Of course we are. It is inevitable when moving an army. Serafall said arrogantly, almost daring to call the Seraph naive.

Yes, yes. My mistake. Who didn't give any sign of noticing the hostile tone or the hidden barbs. *You all are working so hard! I never was good at this 'cloak and dagger' stuff. Azazel, on the other hand, always loved pulling pranks and blaming our younger siblings.*

Serafall's jaw dropped in disbelief. *Pranks?*

Azazel wanted to fall to the ground laughing because he knew Serafall wouldn't crack Gabriel's pure exterior even in a million years. "I was always an imp, wasn't I?"

Good to know that falling wasn't what made you you. Sirzechs commented with a grin. *But back to the previous inquiry, we aren't 100% sure anything is going to happen. Only preparing for the worse, just in case. There is no need to spread panic.* His smirk was

confident. *But if something happens we have our most trustworthy and powerful men prepared. Just in case.*

“In any case, the odds of something happening are 99%. Unless the Hero Faction admits the blunder to their allies, I believe in Shirou’s words and Fake Gilgamesh’s intentions.” Azazel commented and everyone nodded in agreement.

Which raised a new topic. *I suppose now is a good time to discuss Emiya Shirou, the Mage of Swords?* Gabriel asked delicately. *That spike of Divine power everyone felt... It was like an angel had been born.*

Don’t you mean a god? Serafall asked smugly. *Because from the reports, every occultist, magician and yokai from Japan to the main continent thought he was one.* She wanted to see the discomfort on the angel’s face about calling other people ‘god’ in any fashion.

A smile grew in Gabriel’s lips. *If that is how you want to call it, then fine; Emiya Shirou is a god.*

“Kakaka! He hated it when I suggested that.” Azazel was laughing more about the disappointment on Leviathan’s face but also was telling the truth. “But Serafall and everyone else is wrong. Better yet, they seem to forget that just because someone has Divinity that doesn’t mean they are a god of any sort.”

He is the Champion of Medusa. Gabriel said with a nod.

Sirzechs took his turn to ask. *And what did our resident goddess say about the matter?*

A pensive expression took over the Cadre’s face. “She is proud but surprised. Sure the pegasus was always powerful but the combination of it and his Reality Marble made things... interesting to say the least.” He scratched his chin while organizing several ideas in his head. “Haven’t spared with him yet or anything but I am not sure I could beat him even with Fafnir’s help.”

To already be stronger than you is impressive. Serafall commented. *Would you say he is Ultimate Class devil level power?*

“I would say so, yes.” Both Maous looked at each other. “Don’t misunderstand, his power is huge but his speed is the real danger. If we go blow for blow, no weapons, I can win if he doesn’t start running around. To call him fast is an understatement.”

And what has he been doing with his new power? As usual, Gabriel managed to ask the most important questions as innocently as possible.

“Getting used to it, mostly. Learning the kinks of it.”

“What aren’t you telling us, Onii-chan?*

'Damn it, Gabriel! A pure angel shouldn't sound like that.' Worse was that the man knew she wasn't trying to tempt anyone and yet he could even see Serafall blushing. Only Sirzechs didn't react and that was because only his wife could affect him. "Well, you see, remember when I said he was fast... yeah, turns out he went into a warzone when we weren't looking."

He did what?! Serafall asked in a panic as Sirzechs faced grew somber.

"I know, I know. I also know that the moonlit world shouldn't interfere with 'normal' wars for fear of escalation... but to be fair it was the guy's first rodeo when he was flying around the world- Let me finish!" He saw both devils were about to say something while his sister just patiently waited for the story. "He couldn't help himself, alright? He caught a glimpse of tanks charging at civilians and... it was a good thing I was around to stop him from flying towards the aggressor's capital and cutting someone's head off."

Yet Azazel could still feel his cheek hurting from Shirou's punch when he told the redhead that beings like him couldn't and shouldn't interfere in any wars like that. Both sides had contacts with different factions of the moonlit world and the second someone made a wrong move there was a possibility of gods being involved.

Then the Great Treaty would be broken and the chances of the world ending in a fireball rose considerably higher. "I already talked with everyone involved, there will be no further escalation and such. Calm down."

From what I am hearing, it doesn't sound like Shirou would let things end like that.

Already Azazel could detect affection in Gabriel's tone. "After the first incident and a lot of arguments on my part I managed to convince him to refrain from attacking anybody... He still got as many civilians from the area as he could... which was all of them."

It was almost amusing to watch how people puked left and right after exiting super speed and a lot of memories needed to be erased because not only Shirou had saved everybody from the area but he also collected all their most important belongings.

Where did he drop them? Sirzechs finally asked after processing all the information.

"A town far from the frontlines. Then I had to call Kiritsugu to help me clean his son's mess. And pay for all the guns he broke. Which will definitely show up in the budget." At least Shirou hadn't killed anyone, that would definitely be classified as escalation.

But everyone was saved, right? Gabriel sure sounded pleased. *Huhu, Shirou is a good boy.*

That can't happen again. They could hear that Serafall didn't like what needed to be said. *The risk is too high. Human wars need to be fought with human means. If even a magician turns up, especially if he is the Mage of Swords with the powers of a goddess, we are going to have a lot of troubles.*

Azazel nodded slowly. "Yeah, I had to ask Rias to help me convince him to not interfere anywhere else. Thanks to her we managed to convince him to not leave Japan anymore for everyone's sake."

I will send my sister a proper gift to thank her for those efforts. Everyone could see that Sirzechs was serious. What Shirou did was good but too risky and if Rias could stop Medusa's Champion from a repeat performance that would be ideal. *Has he done anything else that warrants worry?*

"Hmm, not directly. You see, I was there to guide him so we stayed out of any god's territory... but he stared at the Mediterranean Sea for quite a while during our tour." The fallen angel massaged his neck to get rid of the stress. "I swear it was like he knew Poseidon's Palace was down there and wanted to pick a fight."

Because of Medusa... Sirzechs wasn't surprised and neither were the women, Gabriel in particular had a concerned expression. *Well, he didn't start that fight so it is fine. He has the right to glare as much as he wants.*

That was before or after you two crossed a war? Gabriel asked out of curiosity.

Her brother wanted to hide his face but stood his ground like a leader should. "It was my mistake. I wanted to get us away from Greece as fast as possible and went the wrong way. To be fair it was day and there were no stars to guide us". Looking from above most of the land looked the same and since they were flying fast it only took a second for them to get in the 'wrong neighborhood'. "His perception also is better than mine so he noticed something was wrong first."

Following that he dropped down, saved some civilians, attacked a couple of tanks and destroyed some weapons before you stopped him? Serafall asked just to be sure.

The Governor General nodded before adding. "And destroyed a lot of ammo too. All was paid and thank the stars that Shirou isn't the killing sort of guy even if they were soldiers because he could have killed hundreds in a second before I had time to tackle him."

What exactly can he do? Gabriel asked innocently once again.

At that question Azazel actually hesitated. "Sister... you are asking me to reveal my friend's secrets."

We already know about his Reality Marble. Nothing can be worse than that. Gabriel reminded him gently and surprisingly the devils agreed.

So did the fallen angel who crossed his arms over the table and gave some thought. "I will give you guys a general overview but, and that is me being fair, he is still figuring out exactly what his True Ascension can do." He offered and nobody disagreed with the idea. "Okay then, let's see... for starters, he can breathe in space."

Nobody looked surprised. *So can most of us.* Serafall pointed out with a look of confusion.

“Right, I expressed myself badly. Unlike us, to whom air is a commodity and not a necessity, Shirou can breathe everywhere as in; Bellerophon can use Divinity to make air. Breathable air.” A small Miracle as far as anyone was concerned but still impressive.

And? Sirzechs asked with a raised eyebrow.

Making Azazel frown before snapping his finger. “Right, too vague. Best way to explain is that Bellerophon’s aura can project a field around its user that not only allows him to survive the vacuum of space but breathe anywhere. You guys getting the picture?”

So he can also breathe underwater.

“Underwater, inside a volcano and, of course, space. But the most impressive thing is that protection can stand to anyone in his arms.” That got some eyebrows shooting up. “Yeah, he took turns taking people deep in the ocean after he and Koneko saw the Dragon Palace. Also, water doesn’t touch him or his passenger unless he lets it and they can still breathe down there even in that case.”

That is interesting. So he can, or better, his pegasus, can take anyone anywhere. Serafall deduced with the other two nodding in agreement. *Fits the Legend.*

“Pretty much. He took Rias to space, apparently they had a date there. Or finished one there. The details are not important.” He could hear Sirzechs groan but moved on. “After diving into Mount Fuji with Akeno, and that is a sentence we are not saying to Baraqiel even if the date stayed PG-13 for our sake, he took the next day to visit his nekomata in Kyoto for the first time.”

Did that make Rias pout? Sirzechs intercepted with a grin. *I remember how happy she was when visiting Kyoto for school. ‘One of Japanese education’s finest privileges’. That he skipped the line must have annoyed her.*

“It did until he tried to take her to Italy for a date only for me to remind them that the Church rules that area and things are still... hot for the lack of a word.”

Oh, oh! I can get them permission. Gabriel offered with a proud smile and completely ignoring that just a few minutes ago she spoke about protests in her organization. *Bet won’t be a problem so long they stay really quiet.* The sweet way she said it made Serafall groan.

Sirzechs and Azazel sweatdropped before the latter said. “Maybe after things calmed down a bit, yeah?” He saw his sister pout but wasn’t so easily fooled. “Anyway they already made peace when he took her to the moon.”

The moon where there are constant wars? The redhead asked out loud with obvious concern. That was the real reason why NASA and any other organization couldn’t land there anymore, the Moon Divinities were always fighting to lay sole claim to their seat of power.

“Obviously they didn’t land anywhere dangerous, it was just to be the first devil and human couple to have a picnic there.”

You know that wasn’t my concern.

“Yeah but Rias made Shirou promise to not interfere and Xenovia pointed out that everyone was fighting for the moon because they wanted to and it wasn’t their business no matter how, and I quote ‘if they want to fight over a dumb giant rock with nothing, let them’.”

Gabriel raised a hand like a child in a classroom. *Excuse me but how did they have a picnic on the moon? Didn’t he need to hold his passenger to give them air or is Rias already strong enough to not need it.*

“Bellerophon is a pegasus and as far as horses go, if Medusa and Shirou’s descriptions are anything to go by, a big one at that.” He extended his arms and wings to their fullest extent. “Bigger than this, believe it or not.” Quickly the fallen angel retracted the appendages before resting his head on a hand. “So we ran some tests on a pool and figured out that, what I shall dub Miracle of Air... No, the Miracle of Breathing would be better? Or maybe just Breath-”

With a calm smile, Sirzechs said. *Azazel you are rambling.*

“Ah, right, sorry.” The scientist in him wanted to run more tests, to truly understand what Bellerophon could do and catalog everything. He also didn’t want to be punched or slapped again. “I just wanted to plug Shirou in a generator for a couple of minutes. So what it was to make coffee, we could have-”

Still rambling, Onii-chan.

Azazel laughed and scratched his neck. “Right, right. Anyway, power levels! People love power levels!” He said with a smirk. “Like we previously established he is faster than me but his strength also increased considerably just not enough to suddenly lift a building from the ground. Mana level wise... technically Shirou didn’t change in that aspect or if he did it was little. When he uses Ascension he is actually using Bellerophon’s mana.”

Excluding the fact his power is Divine, how much mana Bellerophon has?

 Sirzechs asked with obvious curiosity.

“As much as the Heavenly Dragon Emperors in their prime at least.” The fallen angel’s violet eyes shone as his friend smiled. “Oh yeah, that is a Divine Beast alright. Well, a Phantasmal Beast if we go by what Shirou classifies him but yeah; in his prime the pegasus is a creature capable of challenging the gods, same as the Heavenly Dragons.” Amusement shone in his face. “But in a different manner. It bears repeating that while powerful, Bellerophon’s capabilities don’t lie in pure aggressivity like the dragons. With him it is all about movement, speed and adaptation. Then you add Kanshou and Bakuya to the mix.”

Testing the pair together was something Shirou found particularly easy as he already had spent months learning the ins and outs of Bakuya. Adding Kanshou improved the whole dynamic with the White Twin by adding to what was already there.

“The Married Blades are way too suited to Shirou and Bellerophon. They represent the Earth and the Sky, the challenge against the Heavens and obstination against odds.” Azazel chuckled a little. “A horse shouldn’t fly yet pegasus exists. A man shouldn’t be able to create Noble Phantasms yet the Mage lives.” He clapped his hands loudly and while nobody reacted, they were paying close attention. “It is a match Made in Heaven already, adding Kanshou and Bakuya to it is just the cherry on top.”

Why so?

Asked Serafall with as much curiosity as Sirzechs.

“Because the Married Blades are stronger together and their strength grows the more of them are around.” The fallen angel remembered well Shirou’s explanation of how he finally managed a shield of swords. ‘To stop a Star of Destruction... to prevent a Great Flood... That power truly tapped into the Realm of the Gods.’

Playing with his wrist a little, Azazel couldn’t help but admire how he wasn’t feeling any pain or discomfort. Part of it was because of Asia’s Twilight Healing but the other reason was because of how he got hurt in the first place. Seeing his motion everyone grew curious but the man took his time before saying anything.

And when he spoke, the Governor General made sure to sound appreciative and impressed. “Their edge is a thing of wonder; I barely felt it when Shirou cut off my hand.” He chuckled at Gabriel and Serafall shocked faces and Sirzechs overly concerned look. “Nah, don’t worry, I asked him to cut me. We needed to test how strong the swords were with and without Bellerophon... and with more of them around to have a rough estimate of the growth for each copy of the Married Blades around.”

And was it really necessary to cut you?

His sister didn’t bother to hide how displeased she was.

Yet all the man could do was shrug. “Don’t act like I ain’t stronger than most materials. We also tested them against Down Fall Dragon Scale Mail. Funnily enough they did even more damage when I was wearing it.”

And it was without Bellerophon too and ended up costing him having his arm cut off for the second time. The Cadre couldn’t help but chuckle at the members of the ORC faces in that moment when he first suggested it, or the dropped jaws when he asked for it to be done again and again.

But his curiosity got the better of him. A Noble Phantasm with the pegasus backing it up was just something too unique to pass up. Doubly so because the way Shirou was using those resources was something new.

Indeed, something new that had the man, the scientist and the fallen angel that was Azazel almost shouting from the rooftops with excitement. It reminded him of when Humanity was

young and still discovering how to tame nature. Once again he was witnessing an interesting development that made his blood boil.

'Ahh~ How I love humans and their kinks.' Azazel thought with a gentle smile. "Fufufufu. Sister, stop pouting or your face will get stuck like that." He was sure many would enjoy that but he preferred her smiling.

Yet Gabriel couldn't help herself. *I don't like the idea of you hurting yourself in your experiments.*

Her brother waved her concern away. "Asia patched me up in a jiffy. The cuts were also so clean that it was an easy task but I think it was because Shirou really didn't want to hurt me." Leaning back on his chair, he hummed whimsically. "Those swords... they also can adapt and change with Shirou's help, Shirou, not Bellerophon. He was able to..." The black haired man paused before shrugging. "Sorry, I think I already spoke too much."

Are you really going to stop before the good part? Serafall didn't raise her voice but it was a close thing.

Yet Azazel remained resolute. "I won't explain the details of my friend's research. If you want to know more, ask him." His expression was tranquil, without jest or provocation. "It is Shirou's work and he can explain better than me. Not that he needs it, the results speak for themselves."

Can you at least tell us one of those results? The current Leviathan asked if just to satiate her own curiosity if just a little.

Thinking for a moment, Azazel decided on the exact right words. "Kanshou and Bakuya, as long as they are together, they are extremely malleable." Moving his hands he made the shape of a ball before joining his hands into wings and then moving his fingers like he was playing with strings. "They could also be called versatile. Without Bellerophon they can only move by their own whims but when with him... The Mage of Swords gains new and interesting possibilities." The man grinned before adding. "Suffice to say he can do some real fun stuff."

There were several minutes of silence as the trio absorbed the Governor General words and he was happy to grant them as much time as needed. Plenty of what he revealed were things one could easily understand once they observed the Ascension personally. If anything Kanshou and Bakuya and their versatility would be the most unusual part of the whole thing.

However the fact remained that Bellerophon had a power compared to dragons. And not any dragons either but the Red and White Emperors. Ever since those two showed up, and despite their sealing, those two creatures have been considered some of the most dangerous on the planet.

Easily both of them could be competitors for the Top Ten Strongest which Great Red reigned with Ophis firmly on the second spot. Sirzechs was also part of the group but from the first to

the eighth was the distance between the Sun and Neptune to say the least. Sure he was strong but at their prime Ddraig and Albion were in the middle of the pack.

And here Azazel was basically declaring that in pure power alone Bellerophon was the Heavenly Dragons' peer, at least mana wise. However his words also made it clear that the pegasus was lacking something that made the two and even Sirzechs worthy of being in that list; ability.

Or to be more precise an unique ability or Power that could overwhelm anyone or anything below them, something that went beyond brute strength and reached the realm of the absurd.

Ddraig could Boost anything as he pleased.

Albion could Divide anything as he wished.

Sirzechs could Destroy whatever he desired.

Every single creature of the Ten Strongest had one ability or another that could classify them as beings beyond imagination. Even Ophis had Infinity which meant the Ouroboros Dragon had a bottomless well of mana. The only exception was Great Red and only because it never really showed what it really could do.

One day it just defeated Ophis, the previous Strongest and that was that.

Alone Bellerophon wouldn't make the list because although it had the raw power necessary to be put in consideration. He still fell short of someone like the current Lucifer whose constitution and Power of Destruction were a force to be reckoned with.

Then there was the addition of Shirou which was why Azazel wanted to explore his connection with the Married Twins. Indeed the scientist in him was giddy more than any other of his parts. He wanted to know more than ever how exactly a Reality Marble clicked and how it grew with a Phantasmal Beast inside it.

'I could add that since Shirou's world is one of swords, Bellerophon's presence is even more peculiar.' A recollection of Medusa crossed his mind before the Cadre. 'The Blessing he gained by saving her. That is the source of the connection between him and the pegasus but can anything else also share the same connection? If so, Shirou is more interesting than I thought.'

Finally Sirzechs decided to break the silence. *Well, anyway there is nothing for us to worry about.* His smile changed to one full of pride. *He is on our side and like Azazel said, if we have any doubts, we can ask him.*

"Hoh~ Wouldn't it be safer to say he is on Rias' side?" While the room appreciated the joke, Azazel used it to hide his trepidation remembering the look of hate the magus held when being told he couldn't end the war himself. 'Our side, huh?' His smile hid his true feelings.

“Yeah, so long we don’t corner him with anything, Shirou will be on our side alright.”

Moving on to the next in the agenda. Serafall picked up some papers while focusing on being professional. *We really need to talk about the ‘good gods’ that Azazel insists is a good idea to invite to the middle of a terrorist attack.*

“Don’t worry-”

Oh but I worry. The Leviathan sounded sweet but there was also a hint of danger behind it. *We can’t take any risks with gods and if they are to look at us favorably or, at the very very least, don’t jump to help our enemies when things are going down.*

Immediately Azazel’s posture shifted to be passive aggressive as he crossed his arms and stared at the woman. “They won’t do that.”

Not if we make sure our side is the better one to stay allied with. Serafall remarked with an intense look.

Her concern wasn’t exactly unwarranted and everyone in the meeting knew it. None would say she was wrong in raising those concerns and points, that was literally in her job description.

Serafall Leviathan could be whimsical, a siscon and fully immersed in her magical girl persona most of the time but she wouldn’t be one of the Four Satans if she wasn’t competent at the job.

Foreign dignitaries were treated like kings while potential enemies were observed by an easy going pair of eyes with an allure that could be charming and distracting while judging who they could afford to piss off.

Since Azazel was their ally she could be frank with him because at that point if devils heads were going to roll, so would his. Same with Heaven for that matter, all they were bedfellows to hide the secret of God’s death and survive without a Chief God where almost every other Faction had one.

I need names, I need details, I need to know what they are going to eat for breakfast that day so our cooks don’t make the same thing.

Now you are overreacting, Serafall.

Am I? Am I really?

 She challenged her fellow Maou with skeptical eyes.

In the end Azazel had no choice but to relent. “Can’t give you exactly what they will eat on the day unless they arrive early and stay in a hotel but I can give you a list.”

Instantly Serafall was all smiles. *That will be very appreciated. Thank you very much.*

Back and forward they went dealing with several items in their agenda. Sometimes one would raise an issue or point out something that they needed to work on but the meeting went along smoothly. Too smoothly all things considered but that was far from being the first meeting that week and one of several since the Three Factions became allies.

There was already a rhythm between those individuals even if they weren't the usual group that gathered together. That meeting in particular, which happened because of the Khaos Brigade's actions, was an extraordinary affair, the closest thing to an emergency meeting without actually being one.

In an ordinary meeting Michael would be the one present and Sirzechs whose focus was usually the Underworld would be either having a break with his family or would be dealing with the nobility.

However, having a meeting about standard affairs was usual for their alliance and adjusting to account for an attack was as easy as adding more meetings before said attack because they had open communications via their representatives in town.

The Three Factions, specially the Underworld, had time to plan, time to prepare for the attack and thankfully they were already treating the Youth Devil Tournament as an opportunity for diplomatic connections which meant an uptake of security.

Nevertheless they reinforced those due to taking Gilgamesh's 'warning' seriously.

Still they did everything quietly to not alarm the population, still hoping that an attack didn't happen. If it didn't happen, then everything would remain in their control. If it happened then the number of variables was too big for anyone to predict how things could end, for good or ill.

And so the meeting finished a few hours later but to some of them it couldn't be fast enough. While they could go days without rest that didn't mean anyone actually wanted to do it. There was a reason all of them chose to sleep whenever they fancied or even ate in the angels' case.

Well, I think that was all. Serafall's hologram fixed a stack with all her notes from the meeting. *Since Heaven can only give us an angel to help deal with this attack I have no idea why Gabriel had to be here.*

The Seraph chose to stay silent while Sirzechs' smile grew restrained. *Our allies need to hear our plans beyond the tournament.*

But the tournament is the main point of these meetings.

'And you are just trying to pick a fight with Gabriel.' Both Azazel and Sirzechs sighed as the redhead focused on not letting the black haired woman provoke the blonde one any further. *Weren't you going to sleep early for a shoot tomorrow? It was an end of season episode, wasn't it?*

Ah! You are right! I spend too much time on the meeting and I will still have to welcome other diplomates! Urr! I have to reschedule the shoot!

'You extended the meeting by several minutes!' None of the men was willing to say that outloud. Better yet, Azazel thought about throwing some teasing back but a look at Gabriel got rid of those thoughts.

Gotta go! Gotta go! Good night, Zechs! Azazel! Before dispeling the magic holding her image up the twin tailed haired woman threw a glance at the Seraph who smiled at her beautifully while waving a hand.

Good night, Serafall.

Despite her dislike for the woman, or perhaps because of it, Serafall saw no choice but to answer the warming goodbye in kind. *Good night, Gabriel.*

Not even a second later and the Underworld Minister of Foreign Affairs departed which made the Seraph giggle. *She is such a sweet child.*

Yes, Serafall can't help but be childish most of the time. Sirzechs commented, an apology for his friend's attitude already in his tongue. It never left, the angel's gentle smile telling him there was nothing wrong. *Then by your leave, Azazel, Gabriel.*

Unlike his fellow Maou the redhead bowed before finally turning off the magic in his desk and leaving the two angelic beings by themselves. Another moment of silence descended in the room as the younger sibling waited for the older to talk. In fact he would be surprised if she didn't say a word and just left.

Why do you think she dislikes me so much? Yes, Serafall had been correct. Either due to knowledge or first impressions, it was true that Gabriel was Azazel's older sister. *Think this is about... the devils that I killed?*

Clicking his tongue, the fallen angel shook his head. "Sometimes I forget you aren't that much worldly, Onee-chan~" He saw her pout and laughed out loud. "Hahahaha! Don't look at me like that. You lived in Heaven most of the time since Creation. Rarely do you bother to explore Earth unless it was to help with someone's prayer."

A heavy sigh escaped the Seraph. *These days it has been harder answering prayers. Most people don't believe in us anymore... But we must not quit.* A resolved look replaced her normally gentle expression. *So long as there are those who need us, we must keep fighting.*

'Huh, that is the Gabriel that I know and love.' If someone asked Azazel who the 'Ultimate Older Sister' was, akin to a certain goddess who once bestowed the title of Ultimate Maid, he would say 'Gabriel' without hesitation and fight anyone who disagreed.

Always attentive to her siblings' needs, she was the first one to try to stop Lucifer's Rebellion before it grew too big by talking to him and while her efforts failed she ended up convincing several minor angels to reconsider their actions.

But that wasn't the reason why Azazel appreciated her. 'She always knows what we need and tries to make everyone happy by giving them exactly that. If Michael has Father's Fire and Lucifer once had His Light then Gabriel holds His Heart.'

A compassion that could lead her to love even her most hated enemy and always strive for peace while holding on to the principles of what was right and correct at every moment and striving for fairness in every action.

There was just no better diplomat than Gabriel who besides a Heart also had Wisdom.

However Michael and every angel in Heaven feared the risk of sending Gabriel on proper missions. Her Heart was too big, sometimes borderlining on innocent and loving one's enemies left her open to being taken advantage of. Didn't mean the woman was dumb or naive.

'In a way Gabriel knows the cruelties of the world like no other... She just chooses to see the best in people.' Including himself which left Azazel embarrassed more often than not. "No, I have no clue. Sirzechs warned me that she didn't like you for some reason years ago as a joke but..."

Hmm, maybe I should make her something to smooth things over- Cupcakes! Cupcakes make everything better!

"Hahahaha! Maybe she is jealous of your cooking skills? There is no better chef in Heaven!" Helped by the fact whenever a new chef popped up Gabriel would spend time exclusively with them to learn new recipes, or so Michael told him.

However a pensive expression dawned on the Seraph's face. *So you really think it is jealousy...* She began to pout and Azazel knew exactly why.

'That is the sort of thing you can't change without some confrontation or changing yourself, neither alternative is to Gabriel's taste.' The fallen angel suspected even if her Brave Saint Deck was complete, his sister would avoid Rating Games altogether. "Hey, where is that war goddess who slapped Lucifer in the face when his Rebellion started? Didn't you also kicked him in the-"

His sister covered her face before almost walling. *I don't want to talk about it!*

The man laughed and didn't take long for the blonde to giggle a little as the atmosphere grew lighter. "I guarantee that Serafall doesn't have any prejudice or anything of the such. If anything she is usually overly professional when Michael is around."

Holding herself back? That isn't good... Gabriel pointed out with a smile. *Maybe I should show up for one meeting or another, just so she can let loose.*

“Just warn Sirzechs before you drop by.”

Oh, I will coordinate with him. Don't want to impose too much. Whenever he doesn't mind, is available and we don't have anything too serious to discuss.

“Then you may as well fight her and get it all out of her system.” Again Gabriel pouted.
“Hahahaha! I know you don't like it but Rating Games are fun and everyone would love watching Heaven's Diva participate with her own squad of angels.”

Please don't call me that, Otouto.

Chuckling, Azazel could tell his sister was mad even if it was still the cutest thing he saw that day. “Speaking of the Brave Saint System, have you already decided who else is worthy of the Suit of Hearts?”

Several people. Actually, if I could, I would turn them all to angels... A sad smile revealed itself rather timidly. *But I know I can't. Not only that would give Michael heaps of trouble, I don't have enough cards.*

“Come on, you must have some favorites.”

Don't say such a thing! I adore all of them!

“Kakakaka! I don't doubt that!” Azazel figured that if Gabriel had her way she would try and turn everyone into angels. It was just her personality. “Fufufufu. But being realistic here for a bit... is there someone you want to Reincarnate?” Her chin rested on a finger as she thought about his question. “There has to be someone that you appreciate having around that you want them to stay with for all eternity.”

Everyone! Which was why she spent most of her time in Heaven's Gates, waiting for new arrivals. Gabriel was pretty much a tourist guide for the new souls at that point even if she was several ranks above that station.

So an unsurprised Azazel tried a different approach. “What about someone you want to save?” That made the blonde pause. “There is actually someone? Did someone pray for forgiveness hard enough to get your attention?”

... Not forgiveness but... Azazel, he prayed to be good. Eyebrows shot up to the fallen angel's forehead when he noticed the sadness in Gabriel's eyes. *Humans fought so hard to have Free Will and he... he couldn't be anything but evil and yet tried to be good. I managed to stop him from... but he isn't saved yet. And I think no one can save him, not even himself.*

“Why do you say that?”

Because even to save him for the moment, I had to convince him to accept that evil was part of the human soul but he didn't need to let it rule him. Her smile grew more sincere and

she shook her head. *Nevermind, he wouldn't accept Reincarnation even if I offered. That man likes being human more than he knows.* Her eyes went towards something in the distance and she giggled. *Looks like we are going to have to continue this chat later.*

“Something came up?” It was unusual for Heaven to have any problems but not impossible.

Gabriel shook her head. *Sorta but also not. It is one of the reasons why Michael can't send as many reinforcements as he wanted to.* She looked exasperated and a little upset if not outright frustrated. *Several angels still are resisting returning to Earth.*

“Same as the group Exorcists and a few Executors against our alliance, right? A protest?” The Governor General asked coldly.

But surprisingly his sister shook her head. *No, well, yes. But it isn't the same. Even the protesters still work hard when not involved with devils or fallen angels. But these angels... they refuse to go back to Earth no matter who orders it.* She let out a sigh. *They always manage to find someone to trade duties in Heaven so we shouldn't complain but reorganizing everything can be frustrating.*

Considering his sweet sister's problematic expression, Azazel knew the problem wasn't as small as she made it sound. “Well, if they are working anyway, any problems can be mitigated.” Yet he couldn't help but feel there was more to the story.

I better get going. It was great talking with you, Azazel. You should visit Heaven when you get the chance.

“... I will think about it.” Gabriel gave him a truly radiant smile before waving and turning off whatever she was using for the communication spell. With that the fallen angel relaxed in his chair. “Uff. I don't think our younger siblings would welcome me with open arms, Gabriel...”

Still it was good to talk with his sister like that. The black haired man missed those small talks and conversations. In fact he never forgot the things he lost after his fall from Heaven and that weighed in his mind.

‘I wouldn't change a thing.’ Despite all he missed, Azazel knew he gained much in turn. ‘No, a couple of things but falling... best decision of my life... Or was it?’

.....

“Father wishes to speak with you.” And with those words Shirou knew what he would do that evening.

The school nurse had popped up to have lunch with her ‘favorite students’, as she claimed when someone asked which earned him, Ise and Kiba whatever hate the male population of Kuoh still had to give, and informed him right as the bell rang for people to get back to classes.

‘In retrospect, I really should have checked on that guy earlier.’ Shirou pondered on the

almost empty van with crossed arms as Liz silently drove. That day Caren was getting a ride to the church with a nervous Irina who was slightly concerned about what her superior wanted to talk about with the Mage. 'Sure hope she isn't expecting to be scolded. What does she think? That I am reporting on her or something?'

Looking back, the once again redhead thanks to his first lover's magic, saw Irina squirm in her seat beside a smiling Caren who managed to hide that amusement from the angel with ease.

Besides the two of them his eyes focused on Xenovia who was sitting right behind him and trying to understand what her friend's problem was. Because it was the night of the day before they would return to the Underworld for another Rating Game, most devils were actually working on Contracts instead of present. Not that they wanted to go into a church.

Except for Asia who also had Contracts to settle and clients to inform about their temporary abstinence from Fuyuki even if just for a couple of days at most.

Which was why the car was almost empty even if there was a 'devil' still present. "Weren't you two rehearsing a routine?"

Akeno simply smiled like she usually did. "My, my, are you so eager to get rid of us, Shirou-kun?"

"Your nerves are showing." A smug goddess informed her priestess, making the ravenhead blush a little. "Relax, you are going to be fine."

"We should be practicing. I should be practicing."

"Don't worry, you are great. Resting should be your priority right now. And you also have a Rating Game coming. Dance can wait for later as cementing your reputation with devils is a priority as important as your career."

Akeno's eyes shifted left, hiding her shame. "... It is going to be my first time on a stage of any kind."

"Wasn't you the one who insisted every magician trying for Gremory Pacts went through a talent show?" Shirou asked out loud and many in the van turned to look at the Queen. Both Medusa and Caren held gazes of admiration as she sent him a pout. "Besides, it is very much like back in the arena. Just less bloody."

"The arena was fun and exciting because I didn't need to care about anyone but me... and electrocuting the other person." Or dodge lava but that wouldn't be a problem anymore which filled Akeno with pride. "The atmosphere was also different. More- more approachable. Hell, I want to go back there. Can't we go back there?"

"Then like a Rating Game." Shirou shifted immediately. "Actually it is easier than a Rating Game because nobody is trying to blow you up-"

"I disagree!" The ravenhead beauty protested.

"... Also, you are a one woman act so just focus on you." Most women in the van gave him deadpan looks. "What?"

"Shirou doesn't know showbiz." Liz's comment made his eyebrow twitch.

"I am truly disappointed, my Champion."

"... Is showbiz that bad?" Irina asked innocently.

"Feh, can't see how." Xenovia commented with a disinterested expression. "What can be hard about dancing and-"

"Want me to throw you in a dress and have you perform for everyone so we all can see how you fare?" Medusa suggested and the former Exorcist duo shut up. "That is what I thought."

"Fufufufu. I really should join you in these rides more often." Caren commented. "Girls, don't you forget, just because it isn't fighting or swinging a blade, doesn't mean that there isn't dedication involved in art."

Medusa nodded in agreement. "That is right! The best idols, singers, dancers and actors dedicate hours and hours to refine their craft. At least those worthy of being remembered." She placed a hand on her priestess arm and shoulder, almost as if displaying her. "And soon enough they will find a new star amongst their ranks- NO, she will shine as the brightest stars of all!!"

"Sure... no pressure..." Even Xenovia could realize that the goddess was really dedicated to Akeno's success.

However it went beyond that. "Once she became my Head Priestess, promises were made. And she has talent." Without hesitation the girl began rubbing the young woman's legs. "Feel these muscles, they can go for hours without rest! Her choreography can easily be called GRAND and she can beat any of these newbies in her sleep!"

A careful Shirou asked. "Aren't some of them professional dancers?"

Akeno shook her head and returned to the previous topic just to change the subject. "Rating Games are easier; just make sure the other side is hurting so much and can't move and you are set." Some had problems with that description. Neither maid or nun were among them. "It is way harder to work a crowd, or in this case, judges." She let out a deep sigh. "In a fight, things are easy; the objective is concrete and so long as you are the last person standing you are the winner. But the same can't be said about a performance."

Caren caught on what the problem was. "Your success and failure depend on how much the public loves you... Well, perhaps not love-"

"It is a form of love!" Medusa pointed out with authority. "The admiration, the desire to

imitate, of looking at something unattainable and dreaming of the impossible. That is the essence of an Idol!"

A few seconds of silence always followed Medusa's passionate speeches.

Despite how gentle she looked, and how impossible it was to forget she was a goddess, it was in the moments she was passionate about something that the purple haired divinity revealed her inner fire.

A fire that reminded Shirou of a sword's History. "You would get along with Iskandar."

Leaving her passionate state, Medusa tilted her head. "Who?"

"Alexander the Great." An image of a towering redhead man atop of a black horse with a sword on hand came to the Mage's mind. "He also was great with speeches. Yours sorta reminded me a little of his philosophy... how a king needs to be envied by his people to show them the proper path."

Irina scratched her chin in confusion. "Wasn't he a Conqueror?"

"King of Conquerors to be more exact." Akeno remembered the title from a book she once read on Gremory Castle. "His record for conquest was basically unmatched for centuries after his fall and his Legend inspired many wannabe conquerors and such. That is why he is the King of Conquerors. That and toppling the Persian Empire. Fufu. If Shirou-kun is right, he must be happy because many followed his example."

The redhead in question let out a sigh and relaxed his elbow at the door. "Inspirational aside, he still fumbled a lot as a king." Another memory crossed his mind, of the giant man growing feeble, holding his sword and struggling to laugh as he once did, "When asked who was to inherit his Empire the man just shouted 'to the Strongest' which led to its fragmentation and civil wars." Thanks to the rear mirror his eyes met Medusa's. "So while being passionate is good, a little temperance is also nice."

"Fine!" The goddess folded his arms and pouted. "I shall heed your advice, my Champion. But I shall say it again, my priestess shall triumph and enchant the masses."

"And nobody doubts that. Just don't pressure her."

Deciding to add her two cents, Xenovia also commented. "Alexander's whole deal was that he conquered a lot but also died young. How old was he again?"

"Twelve years and a few months after his reign started." Caren replied even if she was uncertain before digging on her phone to search.

"Close, thirteen years." Irina pointed out.

"Net says fifteen." Was the number on Xenovia's phone.

Shirou grunted before closing the subject. "Never mind the actual date. Point is, he died young because he rushed stuff too much." Grumbling under his breath he added. "Going around conquering everything like that could only backfire. And he didn't even care about setting anything for after. That has 'reckless' written all over it." Yet the images of several triumphs flowed from the sword as well which had him blinking. Out loud he said. "So yeah, the moral of the story, while too much caution can create its own fair share of troubles, don't push too much or your soldiers will end exhausted and you won't advance a single more millimeter."

"Calling me a soldier is a bit too much, don't you think?" Akeno could tell Shirou had lost himself on Iskandar's sword for a moment. Of all mementos from Gilgamesh's fight, that wasn't one she expected to be associated with.

But it did get Medusa to stand down. "I just know Akeno can do this."

"And she will. Let her breathe a little. And you." His eyes turned to her. "Remember that back in the arena you were your best self when you stopped overthinking."

"I am not overthinking... just worried."

"Nah, you got this." Xenovia rose in her seat to punch the Queen's shoulder with a smirk. "I suck at dancing but your moves are clean on the battlefield and those dances are really good to look at. You will knock the competition dead."

"Would feel better if I could do that literally."

""Please don't say that!"" Shirou, Irina and surprisingly Medusa retorted at the same time prompting some to turn to the goddess. "What? They also are hopeful idols as well. It is my duty to protect them, especially if my priestess wants to play a prank or two."

Everyone looked at the ravenhead and they all knew she would tease one or two people a little too much regardless who was the senior or not in the showbiz. It filled some of them with confidence that, whatever the case, the woman knew she was good.

But for some reason, she wasn't confident. "Never knew you to be so shy, Akeno." Caren commented from the side.

"Fufufu. Want to try and join me for a dance, Caren?"

Seeing Medusa's shining eyes looking at her, Caren replied quickly. "Could be interesting but it isn't my vocation. I am a nun and some of your dancing steps can be considered improper."

"No sense." The goddess replied for her priestess whose smile grew. "Never liked God's tradition of hiding the forms of His followers. You should be demonstrating the best way to live, leading by example. Why are you hiding how beautiful you are?"

Realizing the corner she was being pushed towards, the silver haired woman began to look

for an escape. "... Doctrine isn't my specialty. Besides, shouldn't we be wondering why Father invited Shirou for a talk of some kind." Irina looked nervous again and the nun knew her previous efforts bore fruit. 'Sorry but between you or me...' She threw the angel under the bus without hesitation. "Probably want to discuss why he and I were stuck in a trap while our resident angel, the powerhouse of the group, was gallivanting around with devils."

That was a lie and most of the van could see it. Most but not all as Irina legitimately felt she fumbled her assignment by allowing that to happen. Which came to the reason why that was a lie; she was too close to Ise and wasn't invited to the 'therapy session'.

Since she wasn't invited, asking her to be guilty of not showing was irrational at best and unfair at every metric. Nobody knew the Hero Faction was going to attack and nobody blamed her for not being present.

It was still an excellent opportunity for teasing since Irina was quite naive and actually believed she was at fault. With two people, Akeno and Caren, there to play around with her and egg the angel on, there was no way the honey haired girl could stop herself from being played around.

All she had to do was realize that she wasn't guilty of anything but until she did Caren was going to use her as bait. "Perhaps Father has received a reply from Heaven. Maybe even a recalling."

"Oooooohhhh." And of course Akeno wouldn't miss a chance to tease their resident angel. Whenever Irina blushed too much she failed to hide her halo and wings which the Queen found absolutely adorable. "That means you get to see Heaven. Have you been there yet? Is it true that the streets are made of clouds?"

"No- I mean, I haven't been there yet but Michael-sama invited me to go whenever I want."

"But maybe it won't be an invitation this time. The Seraph never got to really work with his Ace, did he?"

Caren whispered in Irina's ear. "Maybe even get some proper training in? You do need to build up some power."

"And get better at flying." Akeno pointed out honestly. "Your landing is great but the take off... What else can I say about your take off? You are so confident with a sword but are so afraid of flying."

"I'm not!" Irina's reply just made the other women giggle. "Flying is great!" The two were almost laughing, making the angel puff out her cheeks.

"You are just giving them more ammo, Irina." Was all the advice her bluehead companion was willing to give. "Also I don't think that Kotomine would invite us to just talk about you."

"Really?" The honey haired girl looked at Shirou who was watching the road intently as he could already see the church despite the distance. "But I goofed up, didn't I? It was my job-"

“Going to cut you off right there.” The Mage turned with a raised eyebrow. “You do realize these two are just playing with you, right?”

“They are?!”

“Seriously, you didn’t notice?” Medusa asked with legitimate surprise. “I thought you weren’t that naive.”

With white wings springing from her back and pushing Xenovia to the side a little, Irina lowered her head in shame. “Sorry for being naive.” Her halo illuminated the car but the Light grew smaller as the bluehead patted her head.

“I get you are taking your responsibilities as an angel seriously but nobody saw the kidnapping coming.”

“Attempted kidnapping.” Shirou wasn’t going to let anyone make a bigger deal of what it was. It took him ditching everybody and spending a day in Kyoto for them to cool down and he doesn’t want anyone to worry. “And really, what were you supposed to do? Invade our little session with Ise?”

“... I still want to know why he’s doing therapy in the first place...” Irina confessed with a bashful smile as she retrieved her wings.

At that most didn’t know what to say but Akeno found it easier to distract the angel. “But getting back to your flight, especially the take off.” Wings jumped from Irina’s back once more as she shook her head nervously. “You really are having trouble getting off the ground. Is that some deep fear we don’t know?”

“Do you need some therapy too?” Caren asked gently, leaving the teasing aside for a moment since an angel that couldn’t fly properly sounded really bad for Heaven.

“NO!!!” The sudden rejection surprised everyone and Liz even hit the brakes in shock. “I mean... no offense but I don’t want Father Kotomine as my therapist. Also I don’t need it.” She blushed and her halo grew bright. “I am just beating my wings wrong.”

Both Shirou and Akeno blinked in surprise before the latter spoke again. “Dear, you don’t need to beat your wings all the time.” The shock on the angel’s face made her giggle. “Fufufu. My, my, dear me! It seems Michael-sama failed in explaining that it isn’t just physics making your fly, it is magic.” By the look she was giving the older woman it was clear Irina wasn’t processing what just had been said. “Irina-chan, you are an angel, not a bird. Beating your wings all the time just increases the output of power you are putting on them while also disturbing the wind and messing around with the currents. Sure you can use it to accelerate further but it takes practice.”

“Usually Bellerophon does all that for me but I always got the impression I wasn’t working my wings that hard.”

“Are you two saying that the reason why I am having trouble getting up... is because I am trying too hard?” The former Exorcist noticed Xenovia pat her shoulder in consolation.

“Just like the paintings... and statues... and portraits-”

“That was Saint Peter... I swear.”

“Sure it was, Irina, sure it was...” The bluehead wasn’t going to fight on that. She no longer was Irina’s partner so it wasn’t her problem. “And you were thinking that flying was just beating your wings as well...” Didn’t stop her from retorting a little smugly.

“You don’t get to say that! Your armor does everything!” Once again Irina’s halo was shining brightly as she did her best to hide her wings in shame. “I’m an idiot.”

“Ahh, don’t be like that.” Akeno embraced the younger woman’s shoulders. “We all screw up now and then. Don’t worry. Now you know the problem, we are fixing it.”

“We’re here.” Liz informed everyone and they noticed the van was parked outside the church.

“Hmm, so we are.” Caren commented while unbuckling her seat belt. Soon everyone was jumping out of the vehicle and she stretched her arms. “What a lovely ride. Almost wish it could last forever. Especially with fewer people, give us a chance to get...” she whispered in Irina’s ear, making the angel shiver. “...intimate.”

“Depends on the person, I suppose.” Medusa retorted while staring at the church’s entrance with a pensive frown. “Smaller in person.”

“You have been here before, my goddess?” The Queen couldn’t recall an occasion of the purple haired girl even crossing that area.

To answer the question Medusa pointed left down the street and a purple snake showed itself. “Don’t check this place much but I have some eyes around, just to be safe.” If there was another person who blamed herself for the Hero Faction getting in Fuyuki was Medusa who could understand that they used disguises and other methods to hide but still grew angry nonetheless. “Before anyone asks, I didn’t let any of them inside.”

“Good to know.” Caren commented and Irina nodded in agreement. The idea of sleeping in a snake’s nest wasn’t appealing to either of them.

“You do realize that one day she is going to sit on the Throne of Heaven, right?” Shirou reminded them both before pointing a thumb at the church. “Then these places are going to have snakes, one way or another.”

The nun was proud that she managed to not look offended. “Even then snakes have bad connotations on the Faith. Have you ever heard of what tempted Eve?” Irina’s nods were faster that time.

“Hmm, good point.” Medusa rubbed her chin in thought before shrugging. “Looks like the Bible will have to be edited.” The angel’s face of shock was visible to all and the goddess scoffed. “What? It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“Or the second.” Xenovia pointed out.

“Or the third~” Akeno couldn’t help herself, teasing Caren and Irina at the same time was rare and both looked worried about having snakes around. Which had her making one out of mana before hugging her silver haired friend by the side and whispered in her ear. “Don’t worry~ They don’t bite... unless you want them to.”

Once again the nun was proud of herself for holding back her emotions and replying. “If she really becomes the Mother Above... then I will try to grow accustomed to serpents... but this day is not today.” She declared before escaping Akeno.

A sniggering Shirou patted Medusa’s head before commenting. “Did you hear that? You have already got approval from the Flock.”

“Not entirely.” Medusa’s reply sobered up as she stared at the cross atop of the building. “Nor am I ready for such a burden.” Not while her Counterpart, whoever they were, was around. “I am just now growing to the idea that I am a mother.”

“... You aren’t coming in?” Shirou realized first, kneeling so he could meet the goddess in the eyes. Immediately he noticed she was slightly taller than before and he needed to turn his head up.

Medusa nodded, surprising most of the present. “‘Father died in the War and Mother came to make sure His death wasn’t in vain’. That is Michael’s idea and one that I... am coming to terms with.” Her eyes shifted to the building again before they went to Caren. “But that means I must respect His death, His sacrifice. Don’t worry about having to sleep with snakes, I won’t deprive Humanity of Free Will nor change all of His traditions... There are plenty of branches of His religion and I will embrace all even if they don’t embrace me.” Her gaze returned to the church. “And many won’t. I can live with that. I will live with that if I really become the Mother of Heaven.”

Standing up, Shirou patted her head once again. “I will be here if you need me.”

“So we really aren’t going in then? Great.” Akeno declared as she sat on the front of the van. “Go have your meeting, Shirou-kun. We will be ready to leave when it is over.”

After a chuckle the purple haired goddess said. “You could still go, you know?”

“A devil going inside a church? No thank you, I don’t want to spontaneously combust.”

Caren held her laugh with a hand before saying, “That probably would only happen in the Vatican.” She then looked at the goddess with a calculating expression. She was a being whose emotions were beyond the nun’s grasp and even her poker face was perfect. “And

just because you aren't Goddess yet you don't want to enter a church?"

"Well, that and it sounds improper for a goddess to enter another's temple before her own is even finished."

"There she is. That is the proud goddess we all know and love." Xenovia clapped out loud as Shirou let out a sigh and everyone else either smiled or laughed.

"Then you can wait here with her." Was the Mage's decree and before the knight could say anything he raised a hand. "Liz can watch my back."

The bluehead's fists rested on her waist as she asked in challenge, "Any reason why I should stay behind them?"

"Because Liz doesn't eavesdrop." Xenovia blushed but the redhead's eyes were already on Irina and Caren. "I suppose Kotomine will have a way to stop those two."

Folding her arms and raising a brow, the nun asked, "You sure are confident we are going to do something as boorish as snooping on a private conversation."

"Yeah! That would be wrong and a total violation of privacy." Irina declared with conviction as if the idea itself was abominable to her. "An angel such as myself would never do such thing-"

"Even if it was enough for her to fall." Akeno inserted it without hesitation.

"-even if it was enough for me to fall- Wait, is that enough for me to fall?!" The honey haired woman asked in a panic, revealing her intentions.

She blushed again but that time both wings and halo were held back as Shirou pointed a thumb to the church. "If it is or isn't, you can try." The redhead began to walk with Liz by his side. "See the rest of you in a bit. If we take too long, go back home."

"Nah." Akeno waved him off.

"Yes, we shall wait, Greatest Fool." Medusa declared as she sat down in the driving seat. Grabbing the steering wheel, she admired the vehicle and studied each of its parts. "You know, I am thinking about learning how to handle one of these."

"You have to grow a bit first." Xenovia pointed out and the goddess' cheeks puffed up as she couldn't disagree with the statement.

Shirou smiled kindly as Liz joined his side. Just before he opened the doors of the church he looked up and noticed dark clouds gathering. Summer was starting to give way to autumn and in Fuyuki that meant the rainy season. Yet there were a few weeks before that began and after it the snow would come.

'Summer rain, huh? Better hurry up, just to be sure.' Returning his attention to the church he noticed how illuminated the place looked compared to last time and shone a little brighter when Irina marched inside. 'Is that from having an angel around? Neat.'

"Father Kotomine, we are home! Emiya-san is with us as well!"

"There is no need to shout, Shidou Irina." Kirei arrived by a door behind the altar with a golden cup and a book. "But I am happy that you all returned safely. It wouldn't be good if another kidnapping attempt happened so soon, would it, Emiya Shirou?"

Massaging his shoulder, Shirou brushed off the remark. "Meh, this time I can get away just fine on my own now."

"Is that why your security detail is so small?" Still the priest bowed towards Leysritt who did the same turn even if her bow was lower. "Good evening, I believe we don't know each other."

"Leysritt, Emiya Shirou-sama's maid."

"An honor to properly meet you." He remembered seeing her during Shirou's fight against Altria but was too focused on the Mage's fight against Artoria's reincarnation to give her his full attention.

Something Kotomine could finally do unimpeded and his eyes focused on her face in a manner that the red haired magus found disturbing. There was no malice in them but an intensity that most people would miss. A sort of longing that wasn't longing yet carried a desire as intense as lust but a completely different emotion.

Caren approached the priest to retrieve the contents on his hands before asking. "Father, didn't you have something to talk about with our resident Mage?"

All emotion vanished from his expression. "Indeed, I did. Although, admittedly I didn't expect him to show up so soon."

"We are going back to the Underworld tomorrow for another round of the tournament." Shirou informed as he sat down on a bench while Irina moved to the door Kirei came from. "In that case you won't be hearing from me until next week and I don't know if this something you want is urgent or not..."

"So you decided to come here promptly just in case." The priest concluded as Caren gave the two a look before also moving to the church's other building to change clothes. "Thank you for the discretion, I really appreciate it."

An eyebrow jumped to Shirou's forehead. "That is it? I was expecting something like 'and Rias Gremory allowed you to leave her presence?' or 'and the devils agreed to let you in a church?'. You know, something biting and sarcastic." While Kirei smiled, Shirou grew more nervous. "What is wrong? You aren't dying are you?"

“Not at all. It is just... what I am going to ask you can be classified as a huge favor and I am trying to hold back my sadistic impulses.”

‘A priest shouldn’t admit to having those with a straight face but Kotomine Kirei does it flawlessly.’ The Mage couldn’t help but think which gave Liz the opportunity to approach.

She walked around the priest before commenting. “You have fifty seven weapons inside your coat. Light swords.” The man nodded and waited for what else she would say. “Is your intent to harm my Master?”

“Not at all. All I want to ask is for a favor. Speaking of which; can I trust you to remain discreet about it?” He asked the maid openly, studying her with interested eyes. “I feel... No, I see you are like us. Emotionally different from the rest.” His comment made the white haired woman pause for a second before moving around until she was standing at Shirou’s right. “But unlike us, your case is because you are some sort of homunculus. One of a poorer quality to-”

“If you want a favor, insulting Liz in my face isn’t the way to get it.” Shirou cut the taller man off with a calm expression. He pretty much anticipated that Kirei’s goal wasn’t insulting anyone.

And was proven right with a bow. “Apologies but you know my fascination for people like us. Also her appearance...” He imagined her eyes gold and her hair more bright before chuckling. “It reminded me of someone else.”

“I see...” Shirou found himself cautious at Kirei’s words. ‘He is acting rather oddly. Almost too human...’ A snigger escaped his lips. “What is today? Opposite day or something?”

“Oh? Did I say something odd?” Asked the priest with a smirk.

“You know you did.” The Mage replied with a smirk of his own. “Feeling emotional lately? Did the brush with death suddenly give you a revelation?”

Kirei’s smile actually grew bigger. “Death and I are old acquaintances. Besides, you know why dying actually wouldn’t affect me.” The man walked towards the main altar and placed a hand on it. “Faith already gave me almost every revelation that I could need.”

“It did, didn’t it?” Shirou mused while rubbing his chin before his eyes shifted to Liz and noticed how robotic she looked.

Not liking that expression, he understood why she did it nonetheless; she was fully immersed in her part as a maid from the Einzbern, her mind filtering all information to ignore anything irrelevant to her Master.

It was a state of mind anyone could reach with sufficient focus but Einzbern’s homunculus were smarter than the average person and even one deemed a failure could mediate enough to reach such a thought pattern.

But such focus was unlike Liz and wasted her reserves in basically doing nothing which bothered Shirou. "Anyway, you called me here for something and here I am." Getting back home and something in her stomach would be for the better in his mind. "You aren't the kind of guy to just invite me for tea."

With swift steps, Kirei began to move towards another wall of the church. "Indeed, I am not." There was a huge box made of wood with two doors and Shirou didn't need to guess what it was. "Please," the priest opened one of the doors, "do come in."

"You are joking right?" Still the redhead got up and moved to the giant box that pretty much took over a wall to the west of the church by itself. It was well made, polished to perfection and had a velvet cover inside that could be seen through small holes for air. "You want to use a confessional? Sorry but if I am confessing my sins I am going to the goddess in my house. There I have 100% guarantee of being forgiven."

The man in black chuckled again. "What is the value of such a confession then?"

"Don't know? The Church used to have those so you tell me." Shirou replied sarcastically and Kirei laughed out loud. A laughter which carried a dark joy and very much proper for the villain of a play.

Not bothering to hide his amusement, he whispered. "I wonder how many ended up in Hell thinking the worst of sins would be forgiven by such a frivolous thing."

"Okay, dark humor aside," Shirou touched the confessional box, examining the woodwork with intrigue, "if we want to hear each other's sins, we don't really need a confessional. As far as I know you heard the worst thing I did since... Well, does killing Zolgen count as something bad?"

Kirei needed a moment to ponder that question. "Considering what I heard, killing that man should be grounds to make someone a Saint." There was some disdain in his tone when speaking about the Mage of Insects but soon was replaced by apathy. "If he truly isn't around anymore, there is no proof he is really dead."

"Yeah, becoming dust after a rain of swords would do that." Shirou commented with a chuckle, thinking it would get a similar reaction from the priest.

Yet the taller man gave him a look the redhead couldn't read before shaking his head. "Believe in half of what you can see and nothing of what you hear."

That didn't sound good for the Mage of Swords. "You think-"

"A man doesn't live hundreds of years without developing means to extend his life." Kirei said factually. "In fact, calling him a man would be generous. We are insane men, you and I. Insane but still men." Liz flinched but Shirou didn't really disagree with the idea. "Zolgen is, or was, something else entirely. If I am a monster for my thoughts, he is a monster for his body."

“To be fair you haven’t done anything monstrous just yet.” The redhead pointed out.

That managed to make the priest crack a grin. “Many would say the same but then again, I did it in my position as Executor and on their behalf.” Pointing to the confessional, he added. “In, if you please.”

“Again, why are we going to use that?”

“Because unlike your maid the other two girls in the building won’t hesitate to eavesdrop.” He moved towards the left side of the box and opened the door. “But neither of them would dare try to hear a confession.” Before motioning towards the white haired woman standing to the side. “And just in case you can have your bodyguard stand in front of the doors.”

Shirou gave him a deadpan stare. “Right, just in case.” Kirei chuckled and got inside his booth. After a sigh the redhead turned to Liz. “You can sit down if you want.”

“I will stay on guard just in case.” Leysritt quoted him and the magus really wanted to let out a groan but managed to hold himself back.

If anything that was exactly what Kirei wanted, the man could read Shirou better than most and knew he was uncomfortable about having Liz doing stuff like that. Offering the idea out loud pretty much convinced the maid that it was the best option and nothing that he said could change her mind.

Unless it was a direct order and he didn’t want to give one of those. ‘Damn you, Kotomine.’ With a flick of her wrist Liz called for her halberd and Shirou got inside the booth, sitting down on a wooden bench in the wall before closing the door. ‘That weapon is kinda outdated as well, now that I think about it. If I had anything useful I could give her a Noble Gear... well, maybe I don’t need to give her a Noble Gear but-’

“Are you ready to begin?” Kirei suddenly asked on the other side of the confessional. With how the thing was made it was possible to hear his voice but there was a glass blurring his face.

“You invited me, you start.”

“This isn’t how a confession works.”

“You have to be really joking at this point.”

“Well, we are already here. Is there anything else you want to get out of your chest? Last time we did have a heart to heart-”

“Please don’t call it that.”

“-but in a less proper fashion. This is less intimate but people find the anonymity of a confession reassuring.”

“Because they are actually confessing to God?”

“To some. To others it is like therapy.”

“... Do you have any idea how much I want to punch you in the face right now?”

“I can imagine.” Kirei couldn't hide his amusement even if he tried.

Much to Shirou's exasperation. “Is this all for a joke?”

At that the priest paused, realizing he was reaching the Mage's breaking point. There was just so much the redhead was willing to tolerate from him. While their relationship could be considered amicable, it wasn't really friendly.

Yet he couldn't help but push a little further. “Humor me for a moment. What I have to request isn't easy by any means.” By playing with Shirou's better angels.

After all, the redhead was his opposite and would want to help regardless.

And the Mage of Swords was fully aware of his own weakness. ‘What are you playing at?’ But then he had an idea he was sure both Akeno and Rin would approve of. Perhaps even Caren if circumstances were a little different. “Well, I never did a confession like this before. Where do we start?”

Kirei made a face even if he didn't voice his surprise. ‘He is playing along already?’ He knew wearing the Mage's down was possible so long as it was to help someone but that didn't mean the redhead was the sort who gave in easily. If anything he expected a little more resistance. “All you have to do is admit you sinned and ask for forgiveness.”

“Hmm, is there a specific order or...”

It was the priest's turn to grow suspicious. ‘Is he testing my patience?’ Regardless he would play the game. “You should say something like ‘forgive me, Father, for I have sinned’-”

“And God shall forgive you if you tell Him your sin, Son.” Shirou said quickly but clearly, making Kirei pause. The two stayed silent for a moment but the priest knew the redhead was holding back his laughter the whole time. “So? What is your confession, my child?”

“... I didn't know you were a priest.” His observation was obviously sarcastic.

“Meh. Champion of Medusa. I suppose ‘priest’ falls in that description, somewhere.” Shirou shrugged even if he knew the other man couldn't see it. “For all intents and purposes, you are the one who called me here. If someone owes a confession, it is you.”

A biting reply rested on Kirei's tongue before he paused for a moment. Just a few heartbeats. “Fair enough, I suppose.” It wasn't like Shirou was wrong and the older man could respect that. Didn't mean he was going down so easily. “It has been a long time since

my confession, it was to Gabriel-sama herself. But wait, you have no idea of those sins so should I start with those?”

Realizing that Kotomine Kirei was truly about to dump his own history as an Executor and whatever else he did for the Church on his head actually made Shirou freeze completely before the redhead slapped the sides of his face.

Amusing as it would be hearing all that story, the Mage couldn't say he was really interested. “Let's move on to the present. You wanted me here where nobody else would hear; can I ask why?”

“About what I want or why we need so much privacy to the point I have your maid playing bodyguard while we are inside a confessional pretty much making sure our resident angel can't hear us?”

“Do you need to be so pedantic?” Shirou fully believed that manner of description was only to annoy him.

“Just asking for specifics. Either you are asking for details of why you are in the church today or why we are in a confessional in the first place.” And nothing Kirei said proved otherwise.

The mage let out a sigh before saying. “Get to the point or I am leaving.”

“No you aren't. I need your help.” Kirei had a smug smirk on his face and Shirou didn't need to see it to know it was there.

Yet he fought his better impulses to reply, “‘Help’ can be subjective. You may only need help against boredom and using me as a scapegoat.” His tone of voice was challenging but retained a great deal of patience. “Just because I believe you wouldn't invite me here for something so trivial, doesn't mean I can't be wrong.”

“Fufufu. Did the good man learn to be a bit bad?”

“The last time I raced to help someone lead to a kidnapping attempt so maybe I did.” Both could hear the uncertainty in his tone and another sigh escaped Shirou's lips. “And yeah, I am already here so if this is a trap of some sort, I already fell for it. I know, I know.”

“Far from me to point out your defects if you can already see them.” It would be a waste of time. “Skipping the several sins and piles of bodies that I made over my illustrious career working for the Church...”

Shirou knew Kirei paused for effect but couldn't help himself and replied. “Seriously, you made it really hard to see you as a good guy.”

“Your father has more bodies than I do.”

“Never called him a good guy. Great father but not a good guy.” For the first time in a while Shirou knew he caught the priest off guard. “That out of the way...”

“Right. My apologies again.” While the banter was fun Kirei could tell the redhead’s patience wasn’t endless. “I need you to make a Noble Gear.”

A whole minute passed as several thoughts crossed Shirou’s mind to the point he dove inside his Reality Marble to buy himself a few more moments. Bellerophon stared at him with disbelief as his owner’s heart was filled with conflict over what he could see was a small request.

From the pegasus point of view it was truly small as he couldn’t see how dangerous someone like Kotomine Kirei could be with a Noble Gear in his hands. “Not like I can make many others.” He spoke out loud inside his own soul. “I don’t have enough Cores to power them and even if I did...”

Liz who stood outside was his priority at that point in time. A selfish desire to see everyone he loved safe had him trying to make something for her. Yet her weapon was a halberd and the lack of Cores persisted.

“Perhaps Medusa could help?” Shirou sat down with a sword at his back with crossed legs and lost himself on his musings for a few instants before remembering where he was. “Focus! Kirei just asked me to forge a Noble Gear... Was it-”

A blink of an eye later he was back on the box with the priest on the other side waiting for a reply that the Mage really didn’t know how to give. He knew trusting Kirei wasn’t really an issue, for all his defects the man was loyal to the Church for reasons he couldn’t fathom.

However the level of danger an Executor represented, retired or not and Shirou didn’t believe he was really retired but just working exclusively as a priest in his position as representative, really worried him.

It would be like giving his father one and if he ever did it that Noble Gear would be a defensive one. Something to save his life because the redhead was sure Kiritsugu didn’t need any new means to kill anybody.

And once he had that realization, Shirou realized Kotomine knew that. “Is it for you?” He asked, just to be sure.

“No.” The reply was both surprising and not. Unsurprising because the Mage was right that Kirei knew him enough to know he wouldn’t be receiving any of his creations but surprising because that meant he was asking for someone else. “It is for Caren.”

“Caren? Makes sense I guess.” Once again Shirou was about to get lost in his thoughts.

Only for Kirei to keep him grounded in reality. “Her combat capability has been greatly diminished. The Holy Shroud was lost.”

“I thought she recovered enough to fix it.” At least that was what they told him that night.

Clearly it wasn't the case. "Someone in the Hero Faction recovered more and with just one of that mystic code capable of existing at a time it is obvious it is in their hands now." Both men remembered Jeanne collecting much of the red silk. "Most of it was stolen during the incident so we can say for sure the Hero Faction now possesses the Holy Shroud of Magdalene."

While that was a problem in itself, Shirou had another concern in mind. "She didn't even say anything..." He was, of course, referring to the silver haired nun. "How is she? I mean-"

"Caren was always good at hiding her emotions. Thanks to her ability it was always easy to know when someone was watching her and act as required."

Just the way those words were said helped Shirou reach several conclusions. "You know her for a while. At least since she was a kid."

The priest paused for two seconds and that was enough to be odd. "Indeed I do."

"Is she going to be alright? The Church isn't mad or anything?" Shirou asked with obvious concern.

Kirei hummed before replying. "Fortunately the angels are taking a more hands-on approach with the finer details in Fuyuki. Michael understood the situation and made sure she wouldn't be punished." His tone when speaking about the actual Leader of Heaven was far less respectful when speaking about the Diva of Heaven. "Regardless there are many of our superiors who want her punished and it came in the form of avoiding either sending reinforcements or resources to compensate for the loss of the shroud."

"Michael won't tolerate that." From what the Mage knew of the Archangel he could say that as fact.

Which had Kotomine sighing out loud. "The stupidity of mankind can only be compared to our ingenuity to bend the rules out of pettiness." Surprisingly the man sounded disappointed when the redhead expected amusement. "Angels are naive and a few cardinals that mounted a faction that is against any peace or alliance with devils managed to make 'logical' arguments about why Caren doesn't need anything else for her safety including 'she is with an Executor. He will keep her safe'." Shirou could easily imagine the frown on his face. "While true that they are technically correct and she shouldn't go look for any dangerous situations, unpredictable events can still happen. That was how she lost the Holy Shroud in the first place."

In that case 'logic' should give way to wisdom even if it was to keep the woman safe against the devils who they should be preaching were going to betray the Church at any point.

But that itself held its own distorted 'logic' as that block inside the Church should know the devils don't plan to betray the alliance any time soon so unless something else happened Caren would be safe.

Which brought a whole other lot of problems. “So if something happens and she dies they plan to blame the devils.”

“Pretty much.” Kirei patiently waited for Shirou to let out a sigh of irritation. “Suffice to say I would prefer Caren alive and not as a martyr for a cause she doesn’t believe in.”

To say he was surprised didn’t even begin to describe how Emiya was feeling at that moment. “I get it. I really get it.” He massaged his neck while trying to complete a puzzle in his own mind. “But why?”

“I already gave my reasons-”

“You don’t care for peace. If anything, a war is the sort of environment where you can thrive and we both know it.” Shirou definitively did and he refused to believe Kotomine wasn’t introspective enough to not realize the same. “Also your nature... are you really asking me to give Caren a Noble Gear? That can’t be sympathy.”

Already Kirei could tell nothing he said would convince Shirou unless it was the truth. Not just that but it needed to be said in a way that the redhead would actually believe it was fact and not some sort of a trick.

On that the priest’s nature was against himself and doubly so because the Mage knew it well. “Do you want to hear about Caren’s mother?” The black haired man could practically feel the surprise pouring from the other side of the box. “Claudia was a weak woman. Her body was sickly and frail to the point even when we met it was obvious she wouldn’t live long. Much like Caren, she had the ability to feel emotions but since her body was much weaker even the slightest amount of negativity could harm her. Standing close to a devil was tantamount to being riddled with several needles over her skin.”

His voice was stable and carried a familiar baritone while lacking any obvious emotion. If anyone else heard the priest speaking they would think he was talking about a random person.

“She was your wife.” But Shirou was the one hearing the story and he remembered well when the man said he was once married. “Caren is your daughter.”

“Only for an experiment and yet she understood me as well as you do. Maybe even more... Or less.” At that Kirei sounded uncertain but not melancholic. Indeed it was like the man was talking about the weather. “After realizing I couldn’t love either my wife or daughter I thought about killing myself. Was about to do it. Can you guess what happened?”

No, he couldn’t but if he didn’t give his best shot the evil man would cut the conversation then and there as it was his nature. “She stopped you... and she died.”

Best guess given, Shirou wouldn’t deny his relief when Kotomine continued. “She killed herself to prove her love and that I loved her.” At that moment there was a sadness in his voice the Mage never expected to hear. “I wanted to kill her myself.” Only for his eyes to widen in horror at that confession before he understood how natural it was.

'Truly an evil man... and yet he is here and asking to protect someone else. The daughter of the woman he wanted to kill.' Holding his tongue the redhead waited for the other man's next sentence.

However he refused to acknowledge Caren as his daughter anymore, pushing that information to the deepest corners of his mind until the story ended or risk losing the Kotomine Kirei who wanted his daughter's safety.

Because he was still there, talking. "As I lamented her demise for anything other than my hand, I was about to leave in silence when someone appeared in a golden light. Gabriel-sama, no, Lady Gabriel came because Claudia's prayers despite her being suicidal. Prayers to save me."

Something got Shirou curious. "Why call her 'Lady'?"

"Because she hates being called 'Lady'."

"Of course she does. Sorry for interrupting."

"Not at all." After another pause the man proceeded. "Since I had an angel in front of me, a Seraph to boot, I decided to confess... to pray. To tell her all my woes and pour out the sort of evil man I am." A sense of relief washed over him. "She told me that 'good and evil are part of human nature' and that 'even if sometimes humans have more of one than the other that doesn't mean they don't have a little light for their darkness'. I protested, told her that my wife doomed herself to Hell because of me and I just thought about being the one to kill her. She heard everything patiently before giving me a hug and telling me that 'by trying to fight your own evil, by holding it back for so long and never harming anyone despite the temptation being there you proved yourself good'. She claimed that trying to surpass my own nature was something noble that only humans could do."

"... I can't exactly disagree with her." Shirou confessed after thinking for a second. "You like seeing pain, the torment of others, but you also want to change and are even trying to protect your daughter... Does she know?"

"Despite my best attempts to avoid it, yes, she does. I laughed when she asked me why I left her. That desperate face is one of my happiest memories." Kotomine's chuckle sounded positively sinister to the magus. "But the Church needed an evil man like me to deal with the more... unsavory parts of the job. I am not mad like Freed Sellzan was nor am blind by piety like Vasco Strada. The perfect Executor who enjoys his job but won't challenge the institution. Lady Gabriel saw to it by giving me missions where I would see the worst of human nature. It was fun. She answered all my prayers."

Shirou didn't doubt that was the truth and a part of him feared to hear what exactly Kirei did while working diligently as an Executor. He doubted the man had committed any crimes himself, that wasn't his nature and would only happen if absolutely necessary.

But what Gabriel gave him was a view of everything he could ever want; to see the worst of

the worst Humanity and the job to deal with it at his own pace. And so long the mission was finished at the end of the day Kirei could get away with taking his time and watching, perhaps even participating if he so wished, on the worst sort of deeds.

A paradise for someone like him.

Despite hearing all that Shirou could understand why Gabriel did it. "She taught you to control your impulses. She made you more human." He pointed out and heard nothing in return. After waiting several seconds without anything, he added. "That is why you can ask me to do this for Caren. Some part of you, a part of you that couldn't be suffocated or killed, a part of you that tried to rein those impulses most of your life, loves her." Emiya said with conviction. "It is also why you are loyal to Gabriel, she gave you answers, purpose and a mission that helped to shape your Humanity."

"Perhaps. Who can understand the mind of an angel? They are surprisingly naive but not stupid. Wise but not worldly." Kirei neither confirmed nor denied Shirou's speculations. If anything the redhead's doubt would amuse him greatly for years to come. "So, after hearing all this, can you give her a Noble Gear?"

"Well, you see, that request has a problem... or a hundred." The Mage of Swords explained some of the process of creating a Noble Gear.

And the main concern. "A Core, you say?" Kirei pondered neutrality. "And you are sure it is impossible to make another one? Even with Medusa's help?"

The Mage could see exactly why the priest was asking that. "You are the second father to ask me for one. The other received a Quest that involved him traveling the world to collect the skins of every snake he could get his hands on."

"I don't have enough money for that." Nor would he survive considering some of the serpents Baraqiel faced but that was besides the point. "And Xenovia's Noble Gear is powered by Durandal. So Holy Swords work, correct?"

"Not every sword or even Noble Phantasm can power a Noble Gear. Durandal is exceptional in too many metrics. That is how it earned the name Peerless Sword." Shirou didn't need to say anything else. Neither Ascalon nor minor Holy Swords could do what Durandal did. "If it was so easy I would have already used the Married Blades to forge a new one."

As far as power went Kanshou and Bakuya weren't powerful but were versatile and carried abilities that most people couldn't take advantage of. Sure they were worthy of being Noble Phantasms but their real power came in their attraction, the ability to kill monsters and in working in tandem.

However they lacked the brute force or huge quantity of energy needed to become a Core capable of powering up a Noble Gear. "Anything done with the Married Blades would need a power source of its own to make them really exceptional."

"Only you can say something like a Noble Phantasm isn't exceptional. Well, you and

Gilgamesh.” Kotomine retorted while deep in thought. “But you can push them further thanks to your pegasus and magic. Make them really into something great.”

“They are great swords. Some of the best I ever laid eyes on and certainly the most beautiful... It is just that comparing it to Durandal or even the Gift of a goddess will always make them fall short.”

“If you say so.” Kirei sounded distracted, clearly with other issues in mind. “So there is no way to make a Noble Gear without a power source, preference of course given to swords.”

“Can Caren even use a sword?”

“She can learn.”

Both paused as neither really could think of a solution for the problem as it wasn't like there were many swords around, or any other treasure for that matter, that could just be turned into a Noble Gear.

Those were the sort of weapons whole organizations guarded zealously and getting one wasn't easy by any means.

“What about Caliburn?” When Kirei suggested it Shirou's throat went dry. “She hasn't tried to pull it off just yet. Sees herself as unworthy.”

“...” Emiya didn't know what to reply. That suggestion was the last thing he wanted to consider but it was valid and so he tried to be honest. “You remember how I stopped Altria? That was exactly how. The moment she doubted herself, she was no longer worthy.” He sent a piercing glare and hoped Kotomine could somehow feel it. “And would you condemn your daughter to that hell?”

“Why yes, I would.” In the end no matter what sort of Humanity Kotomine Kirei had he was still evil to the bone. “At least she wouldn't die.”

“We are done.” Shirou didn't know why he was surprised by the older man's words but couldn't stand being in that church any longer and almost broke the confessional on exit.

And almost crashed on Liz's back while she watched over Caren who wore her nun's uniform and Irina who was wearing cargo shorts, a yellow shirt with short sleeves and her hair loose.

Face to face with the silver haired nun Shirou began to study the lines of her face intensely. No matter what Kotomine said, he just couldn't see anything of the man on his daughter. Even her sense of humor was lighter, more warm in a sense.

Then his thoughts shifted to what he heard minutes prior and he couldn't help but imagine a taller version of Caren with a weaker constitution standing beside her. Considering how Kirei watched Liz for a moment it was easy to think about her with shorter hair and a paler complexion even if it wasn't the more precise image.

Still focusing on the silver haired woman Shirou pondered. 'Would she be happy her daughter is back with her father despite who he is?'

"Shirou? Something wrong on my face?" The nun asked aloud even if she could feel the conflict in his emotions. 'Sadness, confusion, anger. Lots of anger and concern.' Turning towards her biological father, she asked, "Was your discussion fruitful?"

"I don't know." The taller man admitted without much concern. "Was it, Emiya Shirou?"

Anger was boiling on the redhead's soul but only for a second before he composed himself. "So and so, I guess." Because while he wanted to help Caren, the Mage really wished he could stab Kotomine's face.

Irina didn't pick up the mood and dodged Liz to ask the men, "What were you two talking about? Was it some secret or we can know?"

Kirei replied vaguely. "Nothing secret but a private conversation." Knowing exactly what buttons to press, he added. "Guy 's talk."

His daughter raised an eyebrow and asked. "Wouldn't the appropriate term be 'boy's talk?'"

Which only served to make the angel more curious. "Those are a thing?" However she was quick to retreat after realizing what those could imply. A smile beamed on his face. "You two are really good friends."

"No, we aren't." Shirou strongly protested. Kirei sure wasn't going to. "And rub off that smile from your face."

"Why? She just observed we are good friends." It took a lot from the Mage to not punch the priest. Fighting Gilgamesh certainly had been easier.

"Is our business done?" Liz unintentionally saved the priest's life.

Only then Shirou realized he truly was debating killing the man. "God, you really do bring the worst in me."

"Why, thank you." If anything Kirei sounded flattered. "But I must ask again if there is some solution to our problem... besides the obvious one."

'Not that Caren can draw Caliburn... but why take that risk?' Shirou gritted his teeth and looked at the silver haired woman again who had her poker face up. He had a couple of other ideas and decided to voice them, just in case. "What about the Brave Saint System?" It was both sudden and random to the three women but he knew Kotomine would understand the suggestion.

Despite his dislike of the man growing monumentally over the last few minutes he would still

respect his privacy. Not really for him but because he didn't know how Caren would react if everyone knew who her father was.

"Unfortunately choosing new angels is not exactly easy. Even if some offers were made, the people themselves need to acknowledge the possibility of becoming a fallen angel if they are too weak." Kotomine smiled in Irina's direction. An honest one which meant nothing good. "Not everyone has the courage to take the risk and accept the responsibility of being the first angels. Or the weight of their failure if they fall. Some, you could say, even rushed the process."

"Hehe." Irina was just mildly proud and embarrassed which dropped Kirei's smile.

'Hah, at least there is someone here whose skin he can't get under so easily.' That brightened his day a little. "There is also what you could lose becoming an angel."

"What did you two talk about?" With her ability to feel emotions it was easy for Caren to grow suspicious. Especially with how vague both men were being. "And don't say 'boy's talk' or 'guy's stuff'. Whatever it was-

"I just had my fill of Kotomine for the day." Both men stared at each other for a moment before Shirou turned to the women and bowed. "Have a good night and nice weekend, Caren. Irina, see you tomorrow." He began to depart with Liz on his trail.

"Ah, sure! See you tomorrow." A surprised Irina waved the redhead away as the resident nun turned to the priest.

She tried to read his emotions, to dig deep in his psych and try to figure out what he was thinking. All she got was a sense of peace and tranquility that shouldn't be easily reached by Humanity as a whole and yet Kirei held it with ease.

Nirvana, some would call it, and yet Caren wouldn't be one of those. If anything she knew very well the dark flower on her father's heart.

"Will you take Lady Gabriel's offer?" Unlike Kotomine who used the title of 'Lady' to play with the Seraph, Caren was absolutely respectful and unaware the angel herself disliked being called such.

"Fufufufu. And join the Grigori?" The man asked as he turned to dwell deeper in the church. "I dislike Azazel. If I had to work for him, I think I would end up killing the man before the year ended."

The silver haired woman shook her head as Irina approached. "I don't get it... Father Kotomine is so loyal and his prayers so full of Faith. Why does he think he is going to fall?"

"Because he will." Caren patted the angel's head affectionately. "Just because someone has faith doesn't mean they are good people."

"I know that." At least she understood it as a former Exorcist who faced many perils. "But he is the man Lady Gabriel chose."

Caren shook her head. "She didn't choose him for piety or loyalty." She watched as the door opened to a dark hallway which Kotomine walked in without any troubles. "She chose him to try and save him from darkness. Unfortunately not everyone can be saved."

.....

Looking at herself in the mirror the woman noticed her skin color was growing paler and her hair was changing from brown to a familiar shade of light blue with every new day that passed as her body grew more acclimated to her soul.

Her eyes were already a completely different color from when she opened them for the first time; purple had turned into a bright pink that could be confused with a gem or coral in the deepest ocean.

Studying her form closely the woman could find no defect but would call it flawed nonetheless. 'They call this beautiful because they don't know true beauty.' Remembering times past that individual would claim that compared to her previous self that body fell supremely short. 'I was magnificent.'

A knock on the door stopped her musings but quickly went ignored as she focused on the image of an ocean with storm clouds moving in the horizon. Immediately her power, represented by a greenish blue aura, began to grow and she could feel the atmosphere even if that empty world had almost none.

Factually not a real one, the artificial dimension wasn't made to sustain life, after all.

She hated that place and hated the weakness it represented.

Also hated the door which was knocked a thrice for the second time. "Come in."

"Pardon my intrusion, Lady Leviathan." The man that went inside was tall with silver hair and yellow eyes wearing fine silk blue buttoned up robes with baggy sleeves. His features were proof of nobility but didn't fit the malicious smile in his face. "The time has come, milady."

"For how long must we continue with this farce." The woman kept looking at the mirror, staring at a body that was hers but at the same time not. "Why can't we just do what is necessary and stop wasting time."

The man moved his right arm in a flourish, involuntary no matter how natural he tried to make the movement appear, and put it over his chest before lowering his head until his waist clearly in a painful fashion.

The last part, she was sure, was deliberate and a way to try to make her uncomfortable or at least make him appear unstable. However it wasn't enough to disturb her or even come close compared to many other things she saw in her long existence.

“Kukuku. Apologies again.” His back went straight a second after and he pulled his arm which let out a sound like bones were being broken. “I am still-”

“Answer my question, Mage. Why are we wasting time?” The beautiful woman turned to him, revealing her naked body in its full glory.

Despite his body nor his spirit reacting at the sight the man knew she was more beautiful than the first time he personally threw her body on a special coffin full of several concoctions that would help with the return of something great.

Indeed the process was a complete success but it was painful and long. “Because we want to avoid a bloodbath that will shrink our forces even further. We can’t go around wasting precious materials, can we?”

Not wasting resources was something she could appreciate. “From what I recall my return is due to one of those bloodbaths.” But she felt impatient, the isolation of being alone despite having hundreds of servants at her beck and call. ‘They are all fools and weaklings. Those who think war is glorious and the point itself.’ Her gaze went to the creature hiding behind a smile so beautiful it would have women swooning. ‘No, that isn’t true.’

At least not to all and she could admit as much. The creature before her was something she knew was possible. A being she pondered creating once but failed due to her own weakness. And it was a weakness, she could freely admit it.

Even before she was beautiful, even before she was magnificent, the woman was something else entirely. An existence that could only exist in the dreams of men and monsters.

“You may think it was just an instant for you but the whole process took days, weeks in fact. Almost a full month before it grew stable.” The silver haired man reminisced as he walked around the room and looked at the memorabilia around it.

Gifts from her ‘peers’ and offerings from servants, treasures of nations and fortunes that could buy a city if sold properly.

All of that was irrelevant to her. “I remember waking up in your box surrounded by strange liquids. I remember busting free with a weak body shaking from pain... I remember a bright flash of light Light and then heat.” She remembered more but wouldn’t say it. She remembers her skin being peeled off from the heat, screaming in fury and dying. “To you it may appear to have been a second. To me it was less and then... an eternity.”

The description was odd even for her but also somehow fitting in her own mind.

There was no better way to describe Nothing.

Nor the difference from suddenly being someone again but how the whiplash of Nothing into something made her feel like every second on the clock was as slow as every moment of existence compressed into hundreds of existences all moving slower than a crawl.

How those moments where she first emerged lasted so long for her, that every second was as painful as the last, until she was something again.

Someone.

Almost like being born again but infinitely worse.

Then she noticed her body had her blood but wasn't the one she once had.

"And it wasn't easy to buy you that 'eternity'." Carefully the man picked up a vase but his hands were shaking and fingers twitching so it wasn't long before it fell and broke into pieces. "Nevertheless the new generation needs to accept Ouroboros' power willingly or else the first stage of the procedure will fail 100% of the time." His tone was honest and free of any malice whatsoever. Yet the woman knew that behind that honesty was a very dangerous poison. "And for that it would be better if they are backed in a corner while doing a job we will benefit from either way. After all, anything that weakens the New Four Maous is good for us in the long run."

It was the fourth time she heard that and the woman knew he wasn't lying. Truth be told he was the only person who never told a single lie to her. Even when he explained the steps he took to save her soul and she was ready to crush his body into a pulp he still kept giving the details just because she asked.

As far as magus went he fit the bill in pride if his voice was any indication. "There is just so much magic can do, especially for beings like yourself." It certainly sounded sweet. Almost like an opera singer performing a lullaby. "Thankfully Infinity expanded our possibilities. As a Concept it is stubborn and hard to grasp but once done... theoretically anyone can do anything... if they put the proper effort on it."

Turning back to the mirror, the woman said, "So we still need Ophis." with a certain level of disdain. "That foolish thing pretending to be a dragon..."

"It is a dragon, milady. The Second Greatest Dragon." The reminder was bitter for her but amusing for him. "Sure it doesn't look like it, acts like it or even fights at all... But it is a dragon and thanks to it this little venture of ours bore excellent fruits." He waved towards the door dramatically. "We must go, Lady Leviathan. You just need to play this part a little longer."

Again he wasn't lying and she hated him for it. "Fine. I shall play my part." The gorgeous woman began to walk towards the door.

Only for his hand to stop her. "May you put some clothes on, milady?" He gestured to her naked form. "We don't need people starting anything. Fools are better off dying in the front line."

An unamused glance went his way before Leviathan raised her right hand and snapped her fingers. A wave of blue mana covered her body before taking a more solid shape covering her toes up to her knees, her hands until her armpits, parts of her breasts and back.

It was a dark blue skin tight suit worthy of belonging to a femme fatale that exposed far too much skin, protected the bare essentials and could easily be called seductive even if the woman in question had no intentions of sleeping with anyone.

Then the mana began to move again and most of her form was covered by a dark green veil flowed from her shoulders towards her lower back and covered her tights while giving her a royal air.

In her head something began to take shape before the woman flickered it away without saying a single word. "Will that do?"

"Not like it is that much different from the style she used to wear. It sure will inspire the men." The silver haired man joked as his lean body bent to the side awkwardly. "May you accompany me, milady?"

"Just show me the way, Makiri. I still had no clue where to go in this rotten dimension." Leviathan believed she was being precise with her words. To her it didn't matter that Dimension Lost created the area, it felt rotten to its core. 'A fake world created by a weakling. Ready to crumble at any time.'

In her eyes that dimension was an abomination because it was unable to sustain itself nor had any life of its own. The sort of space that existed only so long its 'owner' allowed it to exist and the sort of thing that offended her sensibilities. Even as she left the manor and walked its streets all she felt was disgust.

Because no matter how many devils, humans or members of other races inhabited the area it was indeed lifeless. There wasn't a single river, ocean, forests, mountains or even the smallest piece of grass. Nothing could grow naturally there even if the place could be called 'natural' for it was created by a sacred gear, an 'act of god'.

If asked, and she was asked by Rizevim when first voicing her distaste, Leviathan compared *"This place is a castle of sand ready to fall apart the moment there is nobody to keep the wind from toppling it down."*

"But by that point our goals will be complete. What does it matter?" The silver haired devil dressed in elegant robes had asked while playing with his wine.

"It matters because a World should be more than a temporary residency." Even walking through the streets hadn't changed Leviathan's opinion.

The first time she saw devils again after recovering she half expected them all to be like Rizevim; cunning, dangerous and hiding their true intent. Quickly she was met with disappointment as the new devils who were loyal to the Old Satan Faction lacked the drive and individualism of their forebears.

Loyalty was good but it was pointless without originality. 'What is the point of being loyal if you aren't useful?' Leviathan wondered as several men double her size dropped to their knees even when she didn't show a single shred of power to compel them to do such. 'Blind obedience is so pointless. It seems people forgot why Lucifer fell in the first place.'

That was the only man Leviathan admired and that hadn't changed with her return. Her body still felt the flame from God's death burning her body but also could remember the vivid image of the First Rebel. The King of Pride proved his mettle by standing tall to the very end and dying with his Father despite God's mercy.

Another show of rebellion, another reason for Leviathan to admire her leader.

But he was gone and she was alone, the other Satans also dead. Still dead, for the moment.

One which would soon end as their descendants marched foolishly towards their own demise in every sense of the word. 'You aren't worthy. You aren't why we died.' Leviathan thought with barely hidden rage as the skin that wasn't her own struggled to contain her power. But contained it was, the vessel more than suitable from her soul that returned from Nothing. "Are we far?"

Zolgen turned his new body slowly to not reveal how unstable it was. "Milady, we are here." It was an amphitheater with thousands of devils moved for the main entrance while the Mage of Insects guided her to the side. Several armored devils had joined during their trek but Leviathan refused to acknowledge them. "Apologies for the delay, it is my fault we took the scenic route."

They didn't, it was a straight line from the manor where they resided towards the amphitheater but the woman understood that excuse was for her benefit. She should know exactly where they were, it was the place where Katerea prepared most of her troops before attacking the Peace Talks.

Now several times more devils were joining together for an even bigger assault, one that would make or break the Old Satan Faction forever. If successful the descendants of the Four Original Maous would have proven themselves worthy of their thrones by conquering them by force.

Leviathan already knew the end result. "The entrance?"

"Right this way, Lady Leviathan, Lord Lucifer." One of the knights bowed slightly before walking ahead of them.

They went inside a temple-like building made in a manner to mock churches and similar constructions. New to the dimension, the Old Satan Faction went through painful lengths to build it. It was all made of ebony stone, each brick oozing with a supernatural glow that couldn't be found anywhere else.

Each was created by devils who powered hours worthy of demonic energy on a special clay

to make it even more receptive to magic. Thanks to that only devils could see the temple's interior where several images of the Underworld and battles of the devilkind past were depicted through paintings and statues.

Many of those involved the Great War and in one of them Leviathan stopped to stare at. "This painting is wrong." Zolgen had to control himself to not let out a sigh.

"Milady?" One of their bodyguards asked, not even understanding what was wrong in the first place. "That is the battle of-

"The Originals are not properly depicted there." Leviathan cut him off coldly while avoiding to say 'My peers looked better than that. I was greater than that!'

The devils looked at each other before the Mage cleared his throat to say. "Well, it isn't like the artist knew what our illustrious ancestors looked like so they painted them in our image." And indeed standing in the center of the picture were not the Original Satans but four youths. One of those Katerea Leviathan how she looked before Kuoh's invasion. "But if it is bothering you, we can have it removed."

"Yes, Lord Lucifer!" Two knights moved to do as ordered as the silver haired man waved them off.

"Please, do not call me that. That Title belongs to my great father." His tone was full of mirth which could be confounded with devotion and joy. "Worry not about this lowly noble. I am here just to keep Lady Leviathan entertained after her swift recovery. Do remove the painting while I take her to the gathering."

""Yes sir!""

The devils worked while Zolgen guided Leviathan the rest of the way. "Your acting could use some work. Devils are not so submissive."

"Perhaps in the past they weren't." Face stuck in a pleasant smile, it looked a bit plastic but only because the Mage wasn't used to his new body yet. "But things changed. They grew more tame without your and your siblings-"

"We aren't siblings." Leviathan pointed with disinterest. "Just similar existences that found kinship with each other and tried to create something different... Something neither gods or humans approve of." She scoffed. "Allies without a doubt and friends when needed. And I will have them back." Her eyes flashed as she glared at the silver haired man. "Or you will disappear from the face of Earth no matter how many bodies you have stacked."

"Fufufufu. As expected of Lady Leviathan but you do not need to worry." The ancient magus approached to whisper in her ear. "I want the Original Satans back as much as you. Fufufu." He retreated and his hands hid beneath the long sleeves of his robes. "You could say that I was... inspired by the work of a colleague."

Hatred and admiration poured from his tongue in equal measure making the light haired woman curious. "A 'colleague'? And how did this 'colleague' inspire you?"

"A magician never reveals his secrets, fufufu. Just know that I am your ally and will be your ally for as long as the both of us live." With that Zolgen turned and began to march his new body deliberately slowly so as to not attract attention.

Leviathan hummed and followed at the same pace, always watching him carefully. "How long until you are used to your new body?"

"A devil's body isn't that different from a human." The Mage of Insects replied with a smirk. "It is just that I am making room." A centipede emerged from somewhere before entering his ear.

The resurrected Maou was disgusted but said nothing out of respect for the man's magic because it managed to drag her soul from wherever it was when it should have been impossible.

A true resurrection that didn't involve any Realm of the Dead or Divinity but challenged something in the periphery of those by using ingenuity, pure power and the manipulation of the soul short of True Magic.

It just cost the life of one of Leviathan's descendants and several millions units of mana, more than countries worth of ley lines could produce in a lifetime. Fortunately Ophis was willing to part with that much believing it would help kill Great Red. It wouldn't and she would forget about lending that much power just because it was irrelevant to Infinity.

Going deeper into the temple finally they finally found something Leviathan could appreciate; statues that represented her and the Original Satans. Also made of ebony, they had been carved to perfection into shapes that, in the woman's opinion, described how each of them represented themselves.

Hers was of a huge serpent with fins and gills to travel both through water and air, its head was poised proudly and its jaw was open to reveal dozens of spike-like teeth. 'The only thing wrong is the size but the same could be said about all statues. Not that I can blame them for the oversight, this place is only temporary and all too small.'

The temple of the amphitheater was as big as the White House.

Nevertheless her focus went to Asmodeus statue which was next; a humanoid monstrosity with bat-like wings bigger than any devil's, small horns, a body too thin to be healthy, enough to show ribs, and a tongue almost as large as its body.

Beelzebub's was what could only be described as a giant fat fly sitting in a lotus position with its many legs touching each other in several positions; some were just touching the tips or the sides while the upper legs were one over the other as its huge eyes looked up and its four wings hugged its body.

Finally there was Lucifer's and that one was the tallest of the four; a huge humanoid dragon with a lean bulk and six horns spread over its head like a crown with two pointing down, two pointing forward and two bending in a way to almost protect its neck.

Those were the Four Satans' symbols and ambitions. The form they aimed towards and would one day reach. Their greatest aspirations and dreams, just at arms' reach but also as distant as the Sun was to Earth.

For when they reached those forms the World would be theirs.

Then things went wrong. 'Curse you, Great Enemy! Curse you to the deepest abyss!!' Soon a cruel smile grew on her face. 'And you are already there while I am here and soon, you will be alone while we reign!'

"Attention now, Lady Leviathan." Zolgen's call snapped her from reverie. A warning leaving his lips. "You must maintain your disguise. Meat is better prepared free of stress, not knowing anything about what waits for it."

"Katerea!" A man with black hair tied in a small ponytail approached the two. He wore a black doublet with red highlights and several belts, two of them wrapped around his left arm. and even his boots "I am glad to see you are better. The treatment seems to have worked." His violet eyes focused on her hair before focusing on her skin. Or better yet her body as lust filled his gaze which he tried to disguise. "Albeit not without consequences."

"Creuserrey..." Leviathan allowed his name to roll off her tongue making his pointy ears twitch with pleasure. "Shouldn't you already be at the rally? They are already missing Leviathan... they shouldn't be missing Asmodeus' descendant too."

Fixing his red cape, the man moved to embrace her. "I was worried about you." Took a lot of effort from Leviathan to not rip off his arm. "But gladly that Mage did his job. And what an excellent job it was. You look even more radiant than before." Turning towards Zolgen, he offered the silver haired man a smile. "Lucious Lucifer, please remind me to thank your father for his magician's assistance."

The silver haired man lowered his head with an honest smile. "I assure you it was Zolgen's pleasure to help with such an endeavor. The Mage of Insects will do everything to see the Old Satans in their old glory."

Creuserrey was pleased by what he heard. "And he shall. As soon as we take the Underworld and uproot those fakes-"

'Does he ever shut up.' Leviathan disregarded the pureblood devil as she slowly freed herself from him. Creuserrey lost himself talking to Zolgen about what they were going to do once they conquered the Underworld. 'You don't even realize he is playing you. Question is; is the Mage also trying to play me? And how involved is his 'partner'?'

Leviathan remembered Rizevim before meeting her previous end. The cunning young man who cared not for his father or the conflict, only wishing to see the world burn. And to see the

devils doing the burning. Indeed the man wasn't a conqueror but an anarchist whose deepest desire was to stand at the top watching everything else fall apart.

At least that was how the Satan of Envy remembered him. 'I doubt he changed much over the centuries but Zolgen for sure has an agenda of his own.' If anything she could count on the Mage to have a scheme of some sort. 'But I can't trust that either because if Rizevim changed he may still want to burn the world...'

"Hey! Move along you three!" A handsome man with elegant black armor tailored to be similar to the squad surrounding him approached the group. He also wore a long cape with a white fur collar close to his neck with a huge ruby holding it together. "Why aren't you at the front already? The gathering is about to begin and the troops need to see their Kings!"

His strong tone reminded Leviathan of someone else. 'The hair is the wrong color and too short but without a doubt he is a descendant of Beelzebub.' Indeed it was easy for her to imagine black instead of brown for the hair and red in his eyes. 'While he has no right to talk to me in such a way, the attitude is better than the other one's.'

Her eyes shifted to Creuserey who approached the brown haired man with a submissive posture. "I am sorry, Shalba. I just came to check Katerea's situation." He motioned to her as Leviathan struggled to hold back her impatience. "The Mage truly delivered as promised and she made a full recovery."

"Hmm." Shalba studied the woman's form carefully while trying to evaluate her strength, an action Leviathan appreciated. "Are you truly fit for duty, Katerea?"

Again a spike of anger threatened to consume the whole dimension but the Original Maou held it back completely before calmly saying. "Leviathan." She could see Zolgen's smile from the side but ignored the creature using a devil's skin. She couldn't chastise Rizevim sacrificing his descendants since she ate the soul of her own to return from Nothing. "My name is Leviathan and if... we are to claim what rightfully belongs to us, we should use our names."

"Do you think you have any right to say it after your defeat at the hands of the Scapegoat of all people?" Shalba asked while letting out a powerful brown aura that made several devils, including Asmodeus' kin, sweat or shake. However Leviathan's reaction was to stare into his eyes daring him to try something. "You had Serafall there and didn't even manage to face her."

"Lord Beelzebub..." Zolgen stepped forward with a confident stride to put himself between Leviathan and Beelzebub's descendent. Arguably he just saved the pureblood devil's life. "This isn't the time for us to fight amongst each other. Not at the dawn of our triumph."

Automatically Shalba's anger shifted to the man in front of him. "And who are you again?" His anger grew tenfold and his power rose to match as he recognized some of the man's features. "You look like Vali, that traitor." A growl escaped the man's throat revealing a desire for blood.

Zolgen lowered his head as a noble would when talking with a higher ranking one. "Lucious Lucifer, son of Rizevim Lucifer and uncle to said traitor." Quickly the brown aura shifted and diminished as Shalba studied the 'devil' in front of him. "And do not worry, milord, my honorable father already has plans to punish our disgraced kin."

"... Good. If it is to punish the traitor, tell Lord Rizevim he can count on me." A great spike of energy exploded from his body before retreating to Shalba who threw a last glare towards Leviathan. Seeing the woman wasn't going to back down or even direct a word to him eventually the pureblood devil turned around. "Let us go! Today shall mark the last day we will be hiding in the shadows like dogs! Tomorrow we will recover all that is rightfully ours!!!"

Beelzebub's men cheered and so did Creuserey who raised his fist while shouting loudly for all outside the temple to hear. Many were already singing praises towards their leaders as the descendents of the Original Maous marched out to greet thousands of devils ready and waiting.

"So this is it then?" Leviathan asked Zolgen as she walked by his side. The silver haired man's smile never wavered as he tilted his head to show who he was listening to. "After all that, those are our descendants? What a disappointment."

"Milady, I understand your pain but do not worry much." The empty sky of the dimension was filled with devils in heavy armor and weapons of all kinds. Shalba began to make a speech but neither of them cared. "After all, they have their uses." His smile grew wider. "Please do try to keep the troops alive when the party begins. Tomorrow will be a full day for you, I know, but we may need them if not for anything important, than as meat shields."

Leviathan gave him a look before saying aloud for all to hear. "The weak shall die and the strong will rise!!!"

The Old Satan Faction all thought she was talking about them. About how they were about to triumph against the odds and rise from the ashes. How their pain and sacrifices would finally be vindicated.

But Leviathan didn't care since she already played her part.

All that was left was to wait.

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