

[Adam C. POV]

I had arrived just in time to steal the old man's thunder and fight with Jose myself.

And needless to say, I had won, but it felt like a shallow victory, at least for me it did.

I expected a formidable adversary, seeing he was part of the Wizard Saints. Instead, I found a man playing to be strong like a child. How underwhelming.

I honestly thought that he would offer a bit of a challenge, at least. But it seemed Jose was very low in the power scale. Huh, that on itself brought a lot of questions.

For one, the show made it seemed like Jose and Makarov were evenly matched, at least during the first half of the fight, but now that I had fought Jose, I knew very well how much weaker than the old man he was.

It was honestly baffling.

I wonder if the old man originally held back to avoid destroying the town.

That would explain why Jose in his initial efforts to deal with Fairy Tail used tactics that could only be described as spineless by choosing to seal off the old man's magical power.

Shrugging, I sat on the ground, amidst the wreckage of Phantom Lord's base. The evening sky stretches above me, its hues of orange and pink painting a picture of tranquility.

Quite a stark contrast compared to the chaos that had unfolded here, quite a funny thought.

Lost in my thoughts, I suddenly become aware of Mavis' presence as she approaches me with a gentle step, her eyes filled with concern.

"Welcome to my lair," I smiled, my voice soft as I acknowledged her arrival. "What brings you here?"

Rolling her eyes, she takes a seat next to me, her gaze shifting from the remnants of the guild to meet mine. For some reason, there was a sadness in her eyes, an underlying worry that was failing to conceal. "I wanted to talk to you about your Bankai," she begins cautiously.

I turn to face her fully, giving her my undivided attention. "What about it?"

"When you rushed to... fight Jose, I was afraid you would be forced to use it, I know what your Bankai is capable of, and

the consequences of using it," Mavis continued, her voice filled with genuine concern.

I see, she was worried Jose would force me to use my Bankai.

He wished he was that strong.

But, no.

Even if he was that strong, I wouldn't have resorted to using my Bankai against him.

I would've asked Erza, or the old man to help me if that had been the case.

My Bankai was... sadly a one use trump card for me, one that would have to be saved for a special individual.

That being said, Jose didn't even come close to reaching that point, in fact, I was pretty certain I could've defeated him without using my Shikai.

I smile gently, hoping to alleviate some of her worries.

"Promise me, you will never use it," Mavis pleaded, her gaze unwavering as she looked at me with a slight tremble in her voice.

"Mavis, you misunderstand," I sighed, my voice calm yet tinged with determination. "I don't intend on using my Bankai, unless there isn't another option, and even if there wasn't another option, there is a certain someone that might win this... prize."

Mavis's eyes widened slightly, her expression a mix of surprise and apprehension. Taking a deep breath, she ponders for a moment, contemplating the possible targets of my unrevealed Bankai.

And it didn't take a genius to know her mind would probably gravitate towards the likes of Zeref, a formidable foe and a persistent threat to our world.

Nevertheless, he wasn't the one I was thinking about.

"You mean, him?" Mavis replied, her voice barely above a whisper, her concern deepening.

I chuckle softly, shaking my head. "No, and don't take me wrong, he is a formidable adversary, quite possibly still stronger than me, but we both know there's someone even more dangerous lurking out there, don't we?"

Acnologia, the Dragon King, the one possessing a power so unfathomably big that surpasses all others in this earth.

Mavis's eyes widened further, a mix of fear and determination crossing her features. "We will find another way."

"Maybe," I nodded thoughtfully, "But until then, I will keep my options clear."

It's not like I wanted to die, in fact, if I ever found another viable option that could help me avoid such a terrible fate... I would take it without hesitation.

But until such an option came, I would not lie to myself.

"We'll talk about this later... But until then, take some time to reconnect with your friends, bye~" Mavis said, pretending to be her usual happy self, however her voice was still laced with worry, worry she couldn't hide.

As Mavis's presence faded, and I was left alone with my thoughts, another familiar face emerged from the wreckage, breaking her way through the place in a straight line toward my direction.

Erza Scarlet.

She was clad in her battle-worn armor, a mix of exhaustion and relief etched on her face. Her body was covered in cuts, bruises and other wounds, each one being evidence of the fierce battle she had endured to defend the guild.

Yet, despite her injuries, a radiant smile was gracing her lips.

"Finally, you're back!" Erza exclaimed, her voice filled with genuine joy. "We've missed you so much!"

I stand up, smiling at her. It was honestly impressive how positive she was, our guild had been destroyed, some of our members were hurt, but she was still smiling.

She truly was a pillar of strength, unwavering in the face of any adversity. That was a trait I wholeheartedly admired and respected about her, not everyone can keep their spirits up no matter the odds.

"I would say, long time no see, but we saw each other like... two hours ago, when I arrived," I chuckled, my voice filled with warmth as I pulled her in, embracing her in a tight hug. "But, I will say that I've missed you too. It's good to be back."

Without a word, she returned the embrace with equal fervor, her battered body pressing against mine so tight that I was made aware of how much... her adolescence had changed her, at least physically speaking while I was away.

"Are you trying to break my spine?" I joked, feeling the weight of her armor pressing against me.

Despite her wounds, her grip was strong as ever, almost defiant. It's as if she was determined to show me that no

matter what challenges we might face, we'll always find the strength to stand together.

Then again, perhaps I was overthinking things.

As we pulled away from the embrace, Erza's smile turned into a more serious expression.

"We have a lot to catch up on," Erza sighed, her voice carrying a tired undertone. "Things have changed a lot since you left."

If it was any other person, I would have assumed something wrong had happened while I was away. But this was Erza we were talking about, someone with social skills so terribly bad that bordered on insanity.

"Have they?"

Erza nodded, her gaze meeting mine as she shed a single tear. "The master... took the Strawberry Cake out of the Guild's menu."

I deadpanned.

"That's it?" I asked, unable to hide my amusement. "You do know that we can just... get that cake from anywhere else, right?"

Erza pouted, her arms crossed over her chest. "It's a big deal to me, okay? That cake was the only thing that made me happy on my bad days."

I couldn't help but chuckle at that.

"Besides, it is not just about the cake! It's about the tradition! The Guild has always had the Strawberry Cake in its menu, ever since we were kids! The Strawberry Cake has been a staple item in our guild menu for years! A symbol of our unity and camaraderie! And now, it's gone!"

"I'll talk to the master, and see what I can do," I promised, trying to hide my amusement behind a serious expression.

Erza's expression softened, and she gave me a small smile. "You will?! It is indeed very good to have you back! Only you understand the importance of traditions!"

On that subject, I wonder why the master removed that item from the menu?

"So, any other updates besides that?" I asked, hoping to steer the conversation away from... The Strawberry Cake crisis.

Erza nodded, and she took a deep breath before speaking. "A lot of people have joined the Guild since you left. There's Levy, Fried, Bickslow, Evergreen, Jet, Droy, Loke, Happy, and of course, one of my best friends, and companions Lucy."

Lucy had finally joined?

That's right, the entire reason Jose Porla had... supposedly started the Guild War was to... recover Lucy under the orders of her father. That however was all a ruse, seeing as Jose intended to dry Lucy's Family dry in terms of economic power, using Lucy as a leverage.

"Can't wait to meet them," I said with a smile.

As Erza continued to update me on the current state of the Guild.

[Lucy Heartfilia - POV.]

[A few hours ago.]

I stood there, my heart pounding in my chest as I tried to process the overwhelming surge of magic power I had just felt. It was unlike anything I had ever encountered before, a raw force that seemed to shake the very foundations of my being.

The sheer magnitude behind this power... It was almost unreal, and I couldn't help but wonder who... No, what kind of monster could possess such an incredible level of strength.

Lost in my thoughts, I was jolted back to reality as a sudden impact sent a sharp pain coursing through the back of my head. I let out a quiet yelp of surprise and stumbled forward, turning to face the culprit.

Finding Cana, with a mischievous grin on her face, chuckling as she watched my reaction.

"What was that for, Cana?!" I exclaimed, rubbing the sore spot on my head.

This guild was full of crazy people...

Every single one of them was completely crazy.

Cana shrugged nonchalantly, her eyes gleaming with a playful glint. "Just had to snap you out of that daze, Goldy," she replied, her voice laced with amusement. "You were lost in your own little world there."

I narrowed my eyes at her, still reeling from the sudden jolt. "Well, thanks for the wake-up call, but next time say something don't hit me!" I muttered, my annoyance dissipating as I shifted my attention back to the matter at

hand. "On another note, Cana, did you feel that magic power just now? Shouldn't we be... I don't know, worried?"

At this, Cana's grin widened, and she leaned in closer, lowering her voice. "Oh, I see, you wanna know who's behind that power, Lucy? Well don't worry, the one behind that power is my big brother, Adam."

My eyes widened in disbelief, and I struggled to comprehend the revelation.

He was... Cana's brother?!

That Adam?!

How come I hadn't read about that in any magazine?!

Then again, it's no wonder I hadn't read a thing about that, Adam had always been a mysterious figure to me and everyone outside the guild, he was rarely mentioned and rarely seen. In fact, his mysterious demeanor had earned him two years in a row the title of the most wanted bachelor in Fiore.

Bachelor title out of the way, the guy was a walking enigma, almost as much as Mystogan.

All I knew was that he was strong.

Erza had said so herself, declaring that if they fought she had absolutely no hopes of defeating him.

And Erza was pretty much the strongest wizard I knew!

The thought that he possessed such immense magic power was mind-boggling.

"Your brother?" I repeated, my voice barely above a whisper. "Are you sure it's him, Cana? I mean, no offense, but... That level of strength... It's unbelievable."

Cana nodded, a mix of pride and fondness crossing her features. "Yeah, he's something else, isn't he? Adam's always been strong, but it seems that while he was away, he's been pushing his limits even further, not that I expected any less, mind you."

As I absorbed Cana's words, a surge of excitement mingled with a touch of apprehension coursed through me.

Nobody knew a thing about him!

I could be the first one to interview him!

And... perhaps, just perhaps, he could be... the one.

At this I blushed.

"Yeah, that ain't gonna happen," Cana snorted, reading my thoughts as easily as if I had spoken them aloud. "I might not know what my brother's type is, but you sure aren't."

I deflated at Cana's words, realizing that my fantasies of a romantic fairy tale style relationship with Adam were just that: fantasies.

"He hasn't even met me," I pouted, feeling a little hurt by Cana's dismissal.

Cana chuckled, shaking her head. "Feel free to try if you don't believe me, but do tell me, because I wanna record your rejection."