Chapter 61: Shuffled Deck

I do not own Fate/Stay Night and stuffs.

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He had known it was a trap before he had stepped out the front door to follow the woman that claimed to be a representative of the Department of Policies.

Whether or not she really was from the Clocktower was irrelevant. After the shit show that was the Fifth Grail War, Fuyuki should be on lockdown. Not a damn person from any major organization should be allowed into Fuyuki without explicit clearance from the Association or the Tower, which subsequently would be forwarded to Rin or Merem for confirmation. Even if that was the case, the two would be informed if anybody would come for business with him and let him know ahead of time.

Rin and Merem had not contacted him about any guests from the Association. Hence, this woman, or those behind her at least, were not playing by the books. It was as simple as that.

And, in the rare circumstance that he did actually need to be contacted privately in some way by the Vice Director, it sure as hell wouldn’t be in as sloppy a way as this.

She was a rather uninspiring sight. Late thirties, early forties. European decent. Medium length wavy brown hair. Glasses. She looked more like a mother more than a Magus, though she certainly carried herself like the latter. He’d wager that she was a nightmare at PTA meetings.

A brief structural grasping indicated that her clothes were concealing a handful of uninspiring mystic codes. Petty offensive and defensive tools that paled in comparison to what he could conjure and what Sirius could make while blind drunk at four in the morning. It wasn’t an analogy either. He had seen the old bastard makes some pretty horrifying things over the years while on the tap.

“I hope this meeting won’t take long. I still have some obligations to oversee.” He drawled while slipping a hand into the breast of his long coat and appeared to scratch his chest. In reality, he had preemptively manifesting a copy of Natalia just in case, hooking it around a specially made loop of leather that wouldn’t be cut by his blade’s innate curse.

In his other hand, still in his pocket, he began periodically making cheap copies of random small knives before dismissing them. Meaningless trinkets that normally wouldn’t do much in a fight, but he didn’t intend to use them for that.

“I bet you do. No doubt Lady Barthomelloi has you working quite extensively given the circumstances.” The woman smiled politely. It was a practiced fake thing that would fool nobody with experience in politics, however he let it pass. Her actions were standard for one of her supposed position, and not to be taken as an insult.

“If it were up to her, I’d be leading the charge with half of the other Servants to take out an Apostle Ancestor by now.” He shook his head. A bit of a stretch of the truth, but not one that was missed by anyone that knew of Lorelei’s habits.

The woman held back an amused laugh. “Oh my. And here we thought that your relationship was more tenable than what many assumed.”

Shirou snorted sarcastically. “I said she’d have me leading the charge, didn’t I? As far as she’s concerned, it would be an honor to lead a force that powerful against such a vile and hated enemy.”

He wasn’t joking either. Lorelei Barthomelloi was a noblewoman to her very bones, but the moment an opportunity to hunt down an Apostle Ancestor reared its head, she’d make it a point to call dibs on being the one to have first crack at them, lead the charge, and or draw first blood.

Truth be told, if she ever *did* order him to take such a position against a DAA, he genuinely wouldn’t know if she intended for him to be her representative or battle, or expect him to die in the process.

Probably both with all the headaches he’s caused her recently. He wouldn’t blame her for it either.

“Fufu. Well, when you put it that way. Though I do admit you would make quite the sight. Forgive me, but I had thought you were still recovering from the War. Word was your face was quite, altered.”

He laughed humorlessly. Indeed, he had not bothered to cover his face this time around, though that was more out of practicality than anything. She had already seen him when he opened the front door.

He made an eccentric show of covering the left side of his face with his hand, and then pulling it away to reveal his fanged and scaled skin. “You mean this?”

He had to be careful with his tongue when he talked like this. His teeth were razor sharp and he still wasn’t used to his mouth being warped like this yet.

To her credit, the woman didn’t flinch or falter. She merely blinked in some slight surprise. “Oh dear. That, is quite an extensive injury.”

He repeated the action of his hand over his face and returned his flesh and bone to “normal”, channeling some mana noticeably so that she noticed it. No doubt she would assume he had casted some mystery to hide his disfiguration. “It is. And there isn’t enough extensive words in the English or Japanese dictionary for me to fully express what it was like getting it.”

“I shall take your word for it…” she trailed off as she glanced at an upcoming alleyway that bordered some local stores and some fenced off abandoned lots. A convenient location for a private meeting, or other activities. “In here.”

His silver eyes glazed over the seemingly unassuming space as if there was nothing special about it.

There was a person hiding by one of the second story windows of the third building. They weren’t stupid enough to stand right next to it and risk getting caught, but nobody would normally be situated in such an odd position this late at night. A simple enough mistake, but one that betrayed their intention.

The seemingly empty lot to the right was more interesting. There were around ten bodies hiding in the tall grass. He couldn’t tell if they were magi or familiars, but it was enough to clearly indicate that this meeting was not likely to resolve peacefully.

Two steps into the alleyway, his hand in his pocket clenched onto nothing instead of a new dagger.

He wished he could say he was surprised.

*“Let’s see. What exactly is their bounded field interfering with?”* It was an open secret by now that he specialized in Gradient Air by now, and a good quarter of his processes had been exposed over time to the Tower to show that he was actually a Magus worth something, but that didn’t mean that his craft could be countered so easily.

Starting from the beginning, his general proficiency with Structural Grasping was... still there, surprisingly. He had half expected them to try and interfere with his ability to map out and generate precise schematics within his mind. Then again, direct mental interference is rather easy to detect. They probably didn’t want to risk getting caught right off the bat.

If the blueprints weren’t being interfered with in some way, then it must be with the execution of the spell itself then. His mana must be being disrupted somehow while casting, preventing it from taking proper form and concept. Normally this was an easy workaround for most magi, since their skillsets were more diverse. He wasn’t most magi, unfortunately. He’d have to deal with this for the time being.

Then again, this setup alone was a tell that these people had been working with limited resources. Generic mana interference spellcraft was far easier to set up than mental interference, but it was also a double edged sword, and would prevent them from using any major spells as well. Odds are they’d stick to familiars and mystic codes if things got messy. Objects with physical mediums to enact their mysteries.

*“And just to check… yeah. Looks like they’ve set up a field to block my connection to Saber too.”* He sighed, more out of disappointment than anything. These idiots were not being subtle in the slightest. Sure they were cutting him off from his strengths, but it would have been so much more effective if they had waited to enact those parts of the field.

Amateurs. They probably thought that they could block him summoning Saber in an emergency with a Command Spell if he needed to.

From what he could see so far, he didn’t need to.

Oh well. More for him to exploit then. Not like he was going to call them out on it like a brash idiot.

He was well past the building with the magus on the upper floors before the woman finally stopped. “We’re here. Allow me to introduce my compatriots. Xander Galliasta, third in line of the Galliasta family, and his bodyguard, Finrel.”

Two finely dressed men stepped out of the shadows a good ten meters away. A pale tall slim Northern European man in a standard business suit and short cut blonde hair in his early forties, and a handsome slightly shorter man of distinct Middle Eastern descent with wavy dusk brown hair and a tan that unfortunately reminded him of Fina, only much younger. Shirou wouldn’t be surprised if the older man was a bodyguard of some sort.

Galliasta. Shirou recalled that name with some minor annoyance. Whenever he or Sirius tried tracking down the missing samples of the Angra Mainyuu curse that they had sent out for research or examination when Kiritsugu had still been alive, their name had a suspicious habit of always turning up at some point. Normally shortly before the trails conveniently went cold.

A rather ambitious family of magi from the Middle East, to put it politely. They had a habit for exploiting their skills, and people, with curses to further themselves in the mundane and moonlit world. They had been pushing to increase their powerbase in the Clocktower for the past couple of decades, and more than a few groups were wary and annoyed by their activities. But, as with most organizations and cultures, money has a way of keeping people quiet.

“Shirou Emiya. The Magus Killer himself. The Queen’s Silver Dog.” Xander, the shorter tan man smiled like a predator but made no move to approach him. His English was a bit heavy with an accent that Shirou couldn’t identify, but not enough to prevent him from understanding what was said. “My brother actually tried to get into this very War, only to lose his opportunity at the last moment. Given what has transpired, I can only say that he had the devil’s luck, even if he will never admit it, the fool. If even half of the rumors and claims about you are true, then by all rights half of this very island should be up in flames by now had it not been for your meticulous work. You’ve made quite a few waves recently my friend. A very impressive feat for someone as young as yourself.”

“And then some, unfortunately.” Shirou shrugged helplessly with an exaggerated motion that allowed him to glance behind him. As expected, the person in the building behind him was now exposed and watching him through the window. “I somehow doubt this meeting would be taking place otherwise.”

Xander laughed, the gleam in his eyes never dimming. “Hmhm. I suppose that time under Barthomelloi hasn’t been a waste after all. You are not a complete backwater fool. Good good. That will make things faster then. Ms.Faucetti. If you would please.”

Shirou skeptically looked at the woman next to him, as if wordlessly asking her if she truly expected him to be as gullible as he was being treated.

She smiled politely in turn. Either she was as good as the rest of those in Policies at hiding her thoughts, or she had absolutely no idea what the hell was going on.

His concerns about the woman’s loyalties were immediately shunted to the side however when she pulled out an engraved letter sealed shut with the Barthomelloi family’s personal sigil.

He no longer felt like humoring his new acquaintances.

“I see you recognize the work of your Master’s house.” The cocky magus smirked as Shirou slowly took the letter into his hand. “Surely you were taught how to confirm its validity?”

He was. And he already did so just by touching it.

The Barthomelloi were not ones to simply sendoff official and personal missives whenever they wanted to send a message. Much less with their house’s sigil, which was in itself an elaborate array disguised in the shape of a crown. While it would only open for the intended recipient, as a Barthomelloi Representative, Shirou had also been trained to read said sigil to spot any potential forgeries or inconsistencies. After all, it would not do if he was fooled by a mere imitation while on official business.

The irony was not lost on him.

That said, even Shirou would have to admit that it was more or less impossible to imitate the seal. The intricacies in the mystery and design infused in each document were so immaculate and refined that even with his absurd Structural Grasping he felt like he was handling an irreplaceable work of art every time he held onto one.

When he had said as much to the Vice Director when examining one for the first time, he *almost* suspected she had actually been pleased by his words.

Judging from the seal’s minute reaction when placed in his hand, a minor change in the design of the crown sigil, it was actually intended for him. That only made matters more concerning as far as he was concerned.

Without showing weakness or any emotion on his face, he broke the seal and opened the parcel. He didn’t have to worry about any curses or traps in the letter itself. Official Barthomelloi missives were specifically designed to not function as intended if their contents contained any foreign and “unworthy” mysteries inside, and it would be a cold day in hell before anyone that wasn’t a Caster level Servant could fool that seal without him noticing.

Inside, was a letter that more or less had one of the many situations he had expected.

An order to relinquish Avalon to the Association for proper containment and research. Complete with the Barthomelloi sigil at the bottom again as proof of authenticity.

But no signature from the Vice Director.

“I hope there is no trouble with this turn of events.” The man bowed politely. “The management of the artifact you carry is far too sensitive to be discussed over long distances. I was contacted by my associates, Policies, and the Barthomelloi to facilitate the transfer to ensure nothing went, amiss.”

“I see.” Shirou folded the letter calmly back into the envelope and pocketed it. “This is an official document from the Vice Director’s family. I can verify that.”

“Then…” The man made the mistake of looking just a bit too eager to see things were progressing as expected.

“However, please do not be insulted if I wish to validate your task.” Shirou smiled politely as if nothing was amiss. “After all, this is the first time a missive from the Vice Director’s family has ever been sent to me personally. I had always been under the assumption that they would never waste good paper on the family dog.”

The alleyway was eerily silent as his words echoed through their ears.

The woman from Policies, Faucetti, slowly stepped away from Shirou, knowing full well that something was amiss. Judging from the way her eyes were darting between the two parties, it was likely that she did not know what was going on herself. Not so subtly, she reached for one of the mystic codes she had on her person, but it was one of the defensive ones Shirou had identified earlier so he didn’t mark her as his first target.

Xander himself maintained his polite smile, but it was clearly strained. His bodyguard shifted his stance ever so slightly, ready to move at the slightest command. “Is that so? I don’t see why that is necessary, Mr. Emiya. Not after you already verified that the message was genuine. As I stated before, matters regarding the artifact of King Arthur himself must be handled with upmost discretion.”

“I am quite confident that I can manage discrete, Mr. Galliasta. I would not be a good dog if I was not.” Shirou smiled politely while reaching into his pocket with one hand to take out his cell phone.

Xander then did what Shirou half expected the poor fool to do and looked up slightly at a certain spot behind him.

Without even looking, Shirou’s free hand whipped back and out instantly, unleashing a rich and majestic golden blur that snapped behind him at inhuman speeds.

“URK?!” The would-be attacker that had been leaning out of the window on the third floor of the building behind Shirou gasped as his neck was ensnared by Enkidu.

It didn’t matter that the window frame he had been leaning out of had several bounded fields to hide his position and redirect projectiles coming from the outside. It didn’t matter that he had assumed he had hidden himself perfectly from sight and generic magical detection until that point.

The man’s location had already been known from the start, and minor magus level bounded fields had no hope of affecting a Noble Phantasm of Enkidu’s pedigree. Whatever he had been about to attempt to do to the Magus Killer was stopped dead.

CRACK!

Literally.

“It appears that your efforts for our interaction to remain unknown were insufficient, Mr. Galliasta.” Shirou’s smile didn’t change as the golden chain released its hold on the corpse’s shattered neck, falling to the ground and retracting swiftly back under his sleeves like a rapidly moving serpent. Quietly, he pocketed the evidence in the form of a letter. His other hand taking out his cell phone. “Should we relocate, or do you wish to continue the validation of your request?”

“H-how… my bounded field should have…” Xander faltered as what clearly was one of his men was dispatched so carelessly without any effort. It did not help matters that in the barely lit back alleyway, Shirou’s silver eyes seemed to glow with a cold shine that belonged more to a predator than a wielder of the arcane crafts.

“Sir.” The bodyguard, Finrel took a position in front of his charge.

“Is something the matter, Mr. Galliasta? You don’t look too well. Perhaps we should conduct the exchange at another location seeing as this one is clearly compromised. It will give me time to properly contact Policies to ensure that everything is in order.” Shirou didn’t deviate from his polite demeanor that he had more or less conjured while imagining a bastardized combination of Hiori Adashino and Rin’s confident behavior.

He felt dirty as hell, but then again, tonight unfortunately was not going to leave him clean regardless.

He had the fool’s name. He had just taken out the first assassination attempt. And if given time, he would expose this idiot’s plan not just to himself but to the Clocktower proper. More importantly, the Barthomelloi would be quite interested in how he got his hands on one of their personal missives.

The man was ensnared in his own poorly constructed trap, and there was only one way out now.

“Gah! Enough of this shallow game of false pleasantries! Kill him before he calls the Clocktower!” The spoiled prince ordered, prompting his bodyguard to pull out and blow a high pitched whistle.

At the signal, roughly a dozen monstrous looking dolls and creatures of all shapes and sizes rushed out of the open lot to the side and charged at Shirou. Some looked like humans, others animals. There were a couple of what appeared to be lion goat chimeras in the batch, surprisingly.

But what stuck out about all of them were the horrendous condition they were in. Very little fur and hair were on any of them, replaced with fetid and sore flesh, festering wounds, pus and zombie like gashes littered their bodies. They were amalgamations of diseases, poisons and…

“Divine Curses. So that’s where Dad’s samples went.” Shirou’s fake smile vanished as he reached into his coat and ignored Ms. Faucetti’s scream of alarm while she backed away from the mess.

“My family owes you a great debt Emiya! The greatest of curses and soon enough the greatest of artifacts will be in our hands!” Xander boasted as the first beast, one of the chimera, rushed to its target with its diseased maw with only half of its fangs left, open.

It wasn’t even difficult for Shirou to toss the grenade down its throat before leaping away at the last moment.

The stupid beast didn’t register that it had swallowed anything as it turned to continue hunting its prey. It was just about to leap again before its upper body exploded so violently that both heads flew off in separate directions. Truthfully, it was probably a kinder fate than to just let it live at this point.

Shirou didn’t bother to pay the monster any attention as it blew up, instead opting to pull out another grenade and tossing it into the sky as the small army of monsters came down upon him.

Two seconds before they reached their target, the flashbang went off.

A second after that, so did Shirou with the copy of Natalia he had made earlier.

“Trace. On.”

Cursed blade in one hand. Divine chain in the other. Body filled with prana. And the enemy was all blinded and deaf.

What occurred couldn’t even be considered a fight. Shirou literally butchered and tore his way through the small zoo’s worth of corrupted beasts without slowing down. Natalia’s curse of Severing all but ensured that whatever he slashed was either split in half immediately or rent so deep that the victim was crippled and could not retaliate properly.

Likewise, Enkidu either ensnared any unfortunate beast that got too close, or pulled Shirou in whatever direction he needed at a moment’s notice. Combined with his greatly enhanced state from his Reinforcement and it being night time, and it would not be inaccurate to say that he was the true monster in this fight.

That said, Shirou was fairly certain that if Gilgamesh ever found out he was using Enkidu for a petty squabble like this, even if it was a copy, the King of Heroes would have coughed up blood in pure indignation.

With a final swing down with his off hand, the end of Enkidu crushed the skull of a snake he had cut in half earlier but was still capable of spitting projectile venom that he highly suspected was cursed.

And with that…

He jumped away just before Finrel fell on top of him, potentially crushing him if the small crater was any indication.

A blur caught the young assassin’s eyes, but he had already jumped back again before the followup attack had even started. A vicious looking tail that resembled a scorpion’s lashed out from the bodyguard’s backside and nearly impaled Shirou had he not moved ahead of time.

Shirou’s eyes narrowed as he saw the organic plating on the appendage. It was an eerie dull pale flesh color that somehow could fit in dark and bright settings, but did not look healthy at all. His eyes could tell that the thick plated cartilage was more than a step above the flesh and bone that he had been tearing into seconds ago, meaning his sword’s curse wasn’t likely to dice it up in a single exchange

If he had to make a rough guess, the monsters he had just dispatched were the failed experiments, and the guy in front of him was a success. Or at least, what was passed for one.

The two stared down one another for a few seconds, estimating and measuring the other’s potential and weaknesses…

And then Shirou struck first, darting forward with his cold eyes nearly hypnotizing the target with their approach.

Finrel didn’t waste any time lashing out in a vicious counter attack. The poison at the tip of his tail was derived from the Angra Mainyuu samples stolen years ago in transit, a noxious consolidated curse that would ensure an instant victory on contact. A single blow was all he needed to kill most targets within a few extraordinarily painful seconds. Even a Servant wouldn’t be able to walk off getting stabbed by it.

Their exchange went beyond human limitations as both parties lashed out at one another with their unique advantages and absurd physical skills. Finrel’s tail provided to be a vicious threat as it darted and stabbed rapidly, and yet each strike was almost easily avoided, deflected, or countered by Shirou with either the sword in his one hand or the chains wrapped around his other.

To an outside perspective it was an insane battle that few humans could even attempt to follow and even fewer be able to participate in without being butchered instantly.

The air momentarily shook slightly as the large man caught his opponent’s chain wrapped fist with one hand and held his ground. Above him, his tail poised ready to strike.

For Shirou however, this fight… was just a dull brawl.

Without even thinking about the situation he leaned in, slashing the tendons of the wrist holding his own to free himself, and body checked the larger man just in time for the sharp appendage to sail three centimeters right over his head. The unorthodox move forced his opponent back and made him let go, but did not stop the man from striking with his tail once more.

“Double Accel.”

Before the stab had even fully extended, Shirou had already passed Finrel in a blur of red and gold curtesy of the two armaments he held. At five meters, the teen stopped, released his time spell, and pulled his end of Enkidu taught just as the bodyguard regained his footing and turned to reposition himself for another attack.

Finrel staggered as he realized two things at that instant.

The first was that the other end of his opponent’s chain was wrapped around his tail.

The second was that his right leg was deeply gouged right above the kneecap, between the two plates of twisted pale cartilage that armored the majority of his body under his clothes.

The alleyway rang as Shirou threw his sword down at the ground blade first and held onto the golden chain with both hands.

“How did-” The bodyguard’s momentary pause of confusion was interrupted as the teen let out a deep roar from his stomach and used his enhanced strength to *swing* and launch the bodyguard up into the air like a morning star by his tail.

For a good five seconds the poor victim was spun a good twenty feet in the air like a toy, gaining momentum and speed with every passing second, before finally Shirou threw all his body weight down and directed him to the earth on his head.

Even with the speed and weight behind the strike, both Shirou and Finrel knew it was not a lethal blow. The man’s body itself was an organic armor and his insides were modified too. He was to be the meat shield of nobility in a cutthroat and inhuman world. If his existence was not a living mystery, then a living tank would be the only suitable replacement…

Directly accelerating an opponent’s body without their permission was a needlessly difficult and costly maneuver.

“Square Accel.”

Accelerating the chains that held and were in control of said opponent’s general movements however, was far easier.

BANG!!

The poor human meat shield could not even react as the world seemed to blur for just an instant before it all became nothing.

Shirou grimaced as he saw the top half of his opponent literally crumple and explode into gore as it literally fast forwarded itself face first into the asphalt road. He had killed more than a few monsters and people over the years in some pretty messy ways, but this one was admittedly on the brutal side.

He was somewhat relieved that a four times acceleration was all he needed to kill the guy though. A sixteen times multiplier would have broken the chains he was using, Noble Phantasm or not.

Now all that was left was…

“YOU BACKWATER DOG!! FLOOD AND CORRODE! BRING FORTH NOAH’S TRIAL ONTO THE LAKES OF THE SEVENTH CIRCLE!!”

Shirou faltered as a literal *flood* of green flames erupted and poured down the alleyway in a display of wide range magecraft that vastly surpassed what he had expected from the man, let alone most magi of this era. So much so that by the time he had recovered enough to gauge his situation, there was little time to do anything about it.

Enkidu couldn’t get him safely to an alleyway at this angle, or the roofs for that matter. The nearby buildings had barred windows and locked doors that would take him a literal second too long to charge through. He couldn’t project any weapons in this bounded field. Not enough time to use time acceleration on himself and get away or to cover without seriously hurting himself in the process.

Shirou clicked his tongue in annoyance.

For a brief moment, his left hand almost reached for his right forearm before stopping, foregoing that particular last resort for a new plan that came up literally by instinct.

So, he simply held his ground firmly and was overwhelmed by the burning tsunami.

*“My body is made of blades.”*

Xavier held his spell for as long as he could. He had to be sure the Magus Killer was dead. Otherwise he would have no hope of escaping this mess alive, let alone get back home with Avalon. The support he would gain from this achievement and the artifact was enough to protect him from even the Barthomelloi if it came to it.

He *needed* this victory. He needed just one more push to surpass his manwhore of a brother Atrum to be head of the family. For God knows what reason, stealing the samples of Divine Curses was not enough to prove himself. Researching the curses and using them as agents to enhance his familiars, poisons, and materials wasn’t enough.

But Avalon. A genuine Noble Phantasm? And killing the Magus Killer to earn favor with so many families and factions in the Clocktower? That would be enough. His reputation and notoriety would earn more than enough supporters to finally surpass that philandering blonde idiot.

So what if his circuits were not as high quality or numerous? He could easily circumvent that issue with the resources at their disposal. Enhancing and enriching propellants with his own customized water and fire element magecraft, converting the stored potential of electricity into the explosive kinetic of fire with a bit of his personalized cursed and enriched oils from his homeland as an accelerant. It was a disgustingly crude and expensive process financially, but the results spoke for themselves.

He slowly cut off his spell and let the flames die. What he conjured wasn’t particularly *powerful* in terms of offensive strength, but that didn’t matter. The fire was a mere medium to produce the secondary effect that would guarantee him his victory. What he truly needed was for his enemy to *burn*.

Anything and everything burned by his spell would be viciously cursed. Festering wounds that would not heal. A burn was a curse was a burn was a curse, and so on. The cyclical primordial logic between the two would perpetually amplify one another endlessly in a vicious carousel that could eat anything and anything it was imprinted on. Agonizing sears that perpetually dug deep into the bones and nerves that could drive a normal man insane within seconds.

Marring of the soul. Consumption of the flesh. Eroding of the mind. He had tested his ace extensively in case he ever had to use it closer to home. But never did he think he’d have the chance to use it to kill the…

Kill the…

Xavier took a step back, not believing what he saw. “Impossible.”

In the middle of the rapidly dying green flames, Shirou Emiya stood unharmed and unburned. And thus, uncursed.

While appearing cool and collected, Shirou himself was also somewhat perturbed by his unfettered state. He had expected for at least his clothes to be damaged by the attack, but he was more or less untouched.

He glanced at his right hand, which was now a metallic claw and covered in metallic scales.

He then casually brushed off some emerald embers that had stuck to his coat as though they were nothing more than stray specks of dust.

Dywrnwyn. White Hilt. A Noble Phantasm from England that generates and protects its user from flames should it find the individual worthy.

Apparently, and fortunately, the Noble Phantasm didn’t see much difference between being wielded and being worn like literal skin. Nor did it differentiate between flesh and clothes.

As a result, Shirou didn’t burn. And because he didn’t burn, he wasn’t cursed. And his clothes were fine too.

However, he still frowned in concern. Not because his last second gambit didn’t work, but because it did.

He clenched his inhuman hand into a fist momentarily, feeling the metallic nerves firing off and grating against metallic skin.

*I shouldn’t have known that would work. My body… I really might have to leave Fuyuki faster than originally planned…*

It was simple logic. Inside the bounded field, he could not project any weapons. Thus what he had done was not projection but alteration, or rather, a transformation. He did not *produce* the Noble Phantasm that encompassed his arm, but *converted* his flesh and bone into the tool itself.

Not that anyone save for Archer and Caster would be able to tell what had happened exactly just by watching it.

But what really sold his intimidating appearance at that moment that Shirou was completely unaware of was the way his sharp silver eyes seemed to stick out of the darkness of the alleyway like an inhuman predator’s.

“M-monster…” His attention gravitated towards Xander again, who was about three words away from snapping and making a run for it.

Shirou casually pointed his warped right hand at the man and fired off Enkidu’s chain right at him. The links wrapped around the terrified man effortlessly and rapidly like a serpent.

“Now then, can we get back to business, Mr. Galliasta?” Shirou asked with the same calm and pleasant tone he had been speaking with the entire time. “I believe we were about to verify your request for possession of an EX class Noble Phantasm. And while we are at it, discuss where you have obtained such peculiar substances for your bodyguard and what I assume are your familiars.”

He took a step forward. “Of course, if you are being insincere in this endeavor, then I would of course be most appreciative if you could divulge just were you obtained these recent peculiar resources.”

The lordling looked absolutely terrified as Shirou slowly walked towards him, like a prey realizing that it stood no chance against a predator. “A-Alright! You win dog! Release me! I… the letter came from-”

That was as far as he got before the canisters on his body that contained the curse infused oils for his magecraft erupted without warning, taking out its owner in a plume of emerald fire.

The poor fool didn’t even have time to scream.

Shirou clicked his tongue and dismissed the part of the chains wrapped around the burning corpse and turned to look at the most likely suspect.

“Gah?!”

Said suspect screamed in pain as she was thrown from the alleyway between two buildings that she had just been running down and back in plain sight. Already the right side of her face was starting to swell up nicely.

Shirou looked slightly to the side and noticed Assassin melting from the darkness and slowly walking in his direction, Thompson Contender drawn and aimed right at him…

BANG!!

Shirou didn’t even flinch as he heard the body of the chimera that had been approaching him from behind drop instantly.

“Was that really necessary?” He had been about to kill it himself. The monster had not been particularly subtle in its attempt.

“I needed to shoot something tonight.” The Servant flatly stated, putting his weapon away.

It took a moment for Shirou to remember that Irisviel was still a thing, and then relented. Yeah. He had to give Assassin that much.

“Wh-what? A Servant? B-but you said…” The stunned woman faltered as she realized that she was completely outgunned and out of luck.

“I said that *my* Servant was out and that *I* would go alone. Ms. Faucetti.” Shirou politely explained. “Do you really think that after everything that has transpired that the rest of the Masters and Servants here would trust me to my own devices without some form of supervision, even if asked?”

Kiritsugu apparently found the idea amusing enough that he actually broke his silence to snort audibly. “You’d let her escape if you had.”

The teen rolled his eyes as Enkidu once more lashed out and wrapped around their prisoner so she couldn’t run. “Happy now?”

“Never.” The Servant almost showed emotion that time.

“Yeah well, I’m not exactly golden at the moment either.” He paused and looked to the side as something caught his attention. “And we’re not the only ones either.”

Opposed to the malicious and dirty setting around them, Sakura’s rather diminutive two dimensional familiar waddled out into the open and approached Shirou with its hands on its hips. While it couldn’t say anything, the body language was abundantly clear for anyone to read.

The guilty party sighed, knowing he was in for it when he got back home. “How much did you see Sakura?”

The wide outstretched arms more or less indicated that she had witnessed enough before pointing at him accusingly.

“I know. I know. I’ll explain when I get back.” He shook his head before looking around at the cursed green fires that were still consuming parts of the alleyway. “Before anything else, can you handle the fires? I have a feeling they need your special touch to deal with properly.”

The golem tilted to the side, clearly confused for a moment, before turning to the nearest small embers and approached it.

A moment later, a pitch black pool of void spilled out from the adorable little creature and swallowed the fire whole instantly.

The instant after that, the portion of the alleyway was back to normal. No fires or curses at all.

“Thanks Sakura. Can you keep it up? Leave the bodies though. We need to keep those around for the cleanup crew and tracking.”

The tiny little familiar saluted with an adorable huffing motion before continuing its task.

*“Shirou. Are you awake?”* Saber called to her Master through their connection. *“There’s been a minor development that we need your input on.”*

Looks like the bounded field was down at least. He debated telling her what had just happened before thinking better of it. If something was happening on Saber’s end as well it would be best not to escalate matters and potentially make them worse. *“… Ah. Saber. Sorry. I was preoccupied with something on my side.”*

*“Anything we should be concerned about?”*

He almost fell for the strong urge to give a sarcastic or witty reply that would make Archer proud. Almost.

*“… No.”* He shook his head, glancing once more at his prisoner while dismissing the copy of Natalia in his hand. Unlike virtually everything else that had happened recently, this he could handle on his own. Sakura’s aid during cleanup notwithstanding. *“Nothing unexpected that I haven’t taken into account. Just time consuming. Tell me. What happened this time?”*

He took out his cell phone and scrolled through the numbers he had saved on it before he came to Hiori Adashino’s name.

A woman supposedly from Policies decked with substandard mystic codes, guiding a trouble making third in line magus from the Middle East from a family that had most likely been stealing the Angra Mainyu samples he and Sirius had been trying to get examined? And they had conveniently an authentic letter from the Barthomelloi themselves?

There was only so much bullshit he could take.

The Vice Director was without question still busy and swamped with tasks after recent events, but that didn’t mean he didn’t have additional private connections in Policies whenever something was amiss.

*“Merem Solomon requests to be Irisviel’s Master.”*

His thumb stopped over the call button. And his eyebrow twitched something fierce.

*“… I don’t know whether to ask you to repeat that or not.”*

It was going to be a long night.

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