

## [Adam C. POV]

The wind whipped through my hair as we journeyed back towards Magnolia in the boat we had taken from the Tower. The setting sun painted the sky with hues of red and orange, a stark contrast to the dark memories threatening to engulf me.

I had destroyed the Tower. For a second time.

At this point I was starting to wonder if there would be a third.

Hopefully not.

Taking a deep breath, I glanced over at Erza. Even now, hours after the dust had settled, she was staring off into the distance, lost in thought.

It didn't take a genius to know what she was thinking about.

It was hard not to think about what we'd endured in this wretched place. The brutal work, the hopeless days, the pain... it was a life no child should experience, or anyone for that matter.

The point is, I understood what she was going through, I mean, as much I had grown out of my intense hate for this place, it still affected me to some degree.

My mind wandered back to my own escape, to the night when fate had given me a narrow chance, giving me an unlikely opportunity to escape that hell.

I remember my heart pounding fear, anger, hate, the desperate hope, and finally the weightless relief when I realized I was finally free.

Then, as my relief died out, my hate grew, and revenge took place.

Now that I look back, I know it was mostly due to the fact I had thought this was my cross to bear, as well as wanting to pretend my time there never happened.

All of that made me ill-prepared to deal with the storm when it finally came.

Erza on the other hand, had managed this situation better than I had.

Perhaps it was because of how her story had woven itself into.

Unlike me, who had tried to avoid any connection within the Tower, in order to make it easier for me to escape when the time came.

Erza had made connections.

Sure, at the time I had old man Rob to keep me sane, but that was mostly him approaching me, if he hadn't done so, I probably would've avoided any interaction.

Erza and her friends at the Tower. They'd been more fortunate than most, forming bonds amidst the adversity. Bonds that, in the particular case of Jellal, had been shattered and twisted beyond recognition.

"Adam, do you think the Jellal I knew is there?" Erza asked me suddenly, her voice breaking through the silence.

I looked at her, seeing the pain and hope in her eyes. "I don't know," I admitted.

In the anime, the events leading up to him returning to his former self were confusing at best, at least for me, and seeing I had changed everything, not once, but twice, I wasn't sure how that would go.

Jellal.

The mere thought of him evoked mixed feelings within me, I wasn't sure what to feel when it came to him.

Hate?

Pity?

Regret?

It was a complicated thought. Because in essence, Jellal was nothing more than a child stripped of his freedom, a puppet at the mercy of a cruel puppeteer, a victim, just like everybody else.

At least Brain had the decency to leave my mind intact, even if it was to break me down himself, the one thing I was allowed to keep was my mind.

Sighing, I stared out at the horizon.

Shit like this was never easy to deal with.

"I'm sure once we tell the council about what we know, they will help him," I offered after a moment, hoping to ease her troubled thoughts.

He would serve time, no doubt. But hopefully he would do so free off the strings of his captors.

Erza gave me a small smile in response, before looking back out at the sea. "I hope so," she whispered softly.

We stood there in silence, each lost in our own thoughts, comforting one another in a way only we could, until the sound of footsteps brought us both back to reality.

Turning around, I saw Sho, Millianna, Wally and Simon walking towards us.

"Can we talk?" Sho asked me, his eyes darting over to Erza for a brief moment before returning to me.

"Feel free to do so," I nodded, gesturing for them to join us by the railing.

"I... we wanted to apologize for how we acted, and treated you," Millianna began, her voice soft and remorseful, her eyes downcast. "We didn't know the truth, and we were blinded by our anger, but that's not an excuse."

I looked at her, surprised by her words. It was unexpected, but I appreciated the gesture, nonetheless. "It's okay, honestly," I said simply.

"It's not," Sho spoke up, his gaze hardening. "If it hadn't been for you guys, we would've done something unforgivable."

I wanted to tell them that it was truly okay.

That I didn't care.

Mostly because I didn't know them.

I knew their names, and their past, but I didn't know them, so whatever they could've done against me, or did, wasn't really a priority in mind.

I wholeheartedly didn't care they had believed I was some kind of monster.

But I held my tongue and listened as they each took turns apologizing for their actions. It was clear that this was some sort of closure for them, so the least I could do was allow them to finish.

"Well, I appreciate the sentiment, and as I said before, don't worry about it," I said, offering them a small smile.

Simon spoke up next, his voice hesitant. "If I might ask, what will you do now?"

Erza furrowed her eyebrows at the question.

"You want to know if I'm going to hunt Brain, don't you?" I chuckled, a small sigh escaping my lips. "I won't, not actively at least. He will come to me in time, and when that happens, I will deal with it, as I always have."

With that, the remainder of the trip was spent in a comfortable silence, or as much silence as there could be, seeing Natsu was groaning in pain, while we all watched the sun set over the ocean.

Our first stop before Magnolia, The Capital. We had a Wizard Saint to deliver in the hands of the council, and a few words to have with them for that matter.

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**[The next day.]**

**[Crocus - Fiore.]**

As we arrived at the capital, the scent of the salty sea mingled with the distinct aroma of wood and oil, characteristic of the bustling docks of the capital.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Gray asked between crossed arms. "If you don't want to deal with this, I could."

"I'm just turning him over to the authorities," I replied, smiling at him. "And, please put on your clothes."

"Don't ruin this for Juvia!" Juvia hissed from behind me.

"What?! When did this happen?!" Gray exclaimed, his eyes wide with surprise as he looked at himself.

Rolling my eyes at the duo, I turned my attention back to the harbor.

The ship groaned as it docked, the wooden planks creaking under the strain, the ropes straining as they were fastened securely to the pillars.

In my hands, I held the unresisting form of Jellal, who seemed almost in a catatonic state of mind. His head was slightly bowed, his blue hair covering his face, concealing any expression that might give away his thoughts.

I had tried to talk to him the moment he woke up, but since then, all my efforts had been met with silence.

"If the knights get too stupid, be sure to remind them what Guild you belong to," Cana said with a grin, slapping my back as I started to disembark the ship.

Guiding Jellal's movements, I descended the ship's ramp, and almost immediately the busy hum of the dock seemed to cease, coming to a complete halt.

Not that it surprised me.

I had expected this much. Jellal, or rather, Siegrain was a celebrity, at least here, so their reaction was natural.

With each step I took, eyes turned towards me, widening in shock and disbelief as they recognized Jellal.

Eventually, I made my way out of the docks, reaching the center, where I stepped into the Rune Knights Office.

As soon as I entered the place, the noise from the outside was suddenly muffled out of existence, being in turn replaced by the low murmur of knights talking amongst themselves, the clinking of armor, and the rustle of paperwork.

"I'm here to turn the former Wizard Saint," I said, pushing Jellal forward as I approached the desk, at this, the Rune Knights stationed there looked up in surprise.

Their gazes flickered between me and Jellal, shock and disbelief evident in their eyes. "Do you need my statement of the events, or just delivering him will suffice?"

Seeing no response to my question, I handed the bindings keeping Jellal in place to them. They hesitated for a moment before they gingerly accepted what I was giving them, their movements slow and cautious as if unsure how to deal with this turn of events.

Giving them time to process, and ask whatever they had to, I chose to remain for a moment, before taking my leave.

The moment stretched for an eternity as the Knights moved in an almost mechanical manner, the silence in the room being almost deafening.

I guess they don't need me.

Seeing they hadn't asked anything about the events that had transpired on the Tower, I assumed they already knew everything they needed to know, so with that in mind, I turned on my heel and walked out, leaving behind a room of stunned knights with Jellal in their capable hands.

Yawning, I navigated the labyrinthine streets of the capital, intending to return to the ship.

I hadn't slept well, and the reason for that had been simple. I was the only one in the ship capable of handling Jellal if he tried anything.

What can I say? I didn't trust his catatonic state. Broken or not, he was a threat, and my responsibility until now. Now he was the council's problem.

"Halt!"

With those words, a group of about a dozen Knights made their appearance blocking my path, their faces grim and resolute as their leader stepped forward.

"I have to ask, was that a power move?" I chuckled, tilting my head. "I mean, I stayed in your office for around twenty minutes, and no one addressed me, but I leave, and suddenly it's a national emergency?"

Ignoring my attempt to break the ice, the man cleared his throat.

"Adam of Fairy Tail," The leader declared, his voice echoing in the narrow street as he unfurled a scroll to read out loud, "You have been summoned by his majesty, Toma E. Fiore, to meet before the council."

I raised an eyebrow, surprised at the sudden summons.

"To what do I owe this honor?" I asked, my tone laced with sarcasm.

"We cannot disclose any details regarding your summons, you are simply to come," The leader replied, his face serious.

I am simply to come?

Well, ain't that cute.

I let out a deep sigh, running a hand through my hair. As much as it annoyed me how they were wording their invitation, I really couldn't do much without bringing politics into the table for the Guild.

"Very well," I said, gazing at the distant docks. "You might want to let me tell my companions I'm going to be missing for a bit."

"No," The leader said firmly, "You are to come with us immediately."

I narrowed my eyes at the man in front of me.

"Look... I'm trying to be understanding here, I am, I truly am, but I'm not a dog that will follow your every command blindly," I said, my voice sharp. "Perhaps you are misinterpreting my willingness to collaborate as a sign of weakness, in which case, let's make one thing very clear, if I wanted to, none of you would be able to take me anywhere against my will."

The Knights tensed, their hands moving towards their weapons, but their leader raised his hand to signal them to stand down.

"Adam of Fairy Tail," The leader replied, his voice low and dangerous, "I understand your concerns, however. We are under strict orders to bring you to the council without any detours."

I raised an eyebrow. "Are you completely sure you don't want to reconsider your position on the matter? Keep in mind I am not against following you guys to meet the council, I just want to avoid my group worrying about my whereabouts."

Natsu would probably storm into the castle, threatening to burn everything.

"No, your friends will be informed once the clearance for such action is granted," The leader replied, his gaze unwavering.

I let out a deep sigh. "Just remember, you asked for this."

Having said that, I slammed my hands together, palms flat and parallel, a blue-white light emanating from the space between them as a blue-tinted Kido barrier materialized around me in an instant.

"Let me know once you're ready to cooperate," I said, laying my back on the ground, watching as the Knights started to try and break the barrier to get me out.

Perhaps I was being petty.

But I had a good reason to be petty, avoiding the very probable event of Natsu going on a destructive rampage just to 'rescue' me.

It wasn't even because I cared about the possible destruction. It was mostly because I wanted to avoid the old man going bankrupt because of him, more than he already is, that is.

"Defying a Royal summon it's a crime! Your actions now are only adding up to any possible conviction!" The leader of the Knights warned me, his voice rising in anger. "Come out of that barrier, now!"

"That's enough, soldier," A new voice interrupted, its tone calm and authoritative. The Knights immediately straightened up, standing at attention as a tall, regal figure approached us.

The man wore a long, flowing robe made of fine silk, embroidered with intricate golden patterns that glinted in the sunlight. "My apologies, Mr. Clive, I should have known they would take the orders at face value."

"It seems you have me at a disadvantage, so if it's not too much to ask, who are you?" I asked, my eyes narrowing as I studied the man before me. There was something about his presence that didn't quite click with me.

The man smiled gently, his blue eyes twinkling with amusement. "My name is Crawford Meront, and you could say that I'm their boss."

Well, that was vague as fuck, but I can work with that.

"With your introduction, am I to assume I can tell my group then?" I asked, pushing my body off the ground.

"Indeed," Crawford replied with a curt nod, "Feel free to tell them about the situation, take your time, we will be here to escort you to the council once you finish dealing with your personal affairs."

Taking his word as the confirmation I needed, I dropped the shield down, and started walking back to the docks without looking back, as Crawford and the Knights remained back in position.

Well.

That was fun.

