

[Erza Scarlet. POV]

Outside the Casino at Resort Akane, the sky was split with the last remnants of the setting sun, painting the clearing in hues of red and orange as some of my childhood friends stood before me, but as my enemies.

Sho.

Simon.

Millianna.

Wally.

And Simon.

Their eyes were filled with hatred, a smirk playing on their lips as they looked at me, their emotions and thoughts about me, clear as the day.

They hated me.

I didn't know what had happened since the last time I saw them, but somehow, they had become the living symbol of everything I had come to loathe.

"You can't defeat us, surrender," I said, with a firm voice, trying to mask the pain behind those words.

"Or don't," Gray growled, cracking his knuckles. "Please don't, I have a lot of things to work through, and beating your guys is therapy."

"Gray-sama!" Juvia squealed, making Gray flinch.

"Oh, Erza, we never intended to defeat you," Millianna replied, her voice dripping with venom. "We just wanted your attention."

My heart skipped a beat.

Just why did they hate me? I couldn't remember doing anything that would warrant such hatred.

"Enough talk," Cana said, stepping forward, glaring at them. "I don't know who you are, or what you want, but I won't forgive anyone who dares to interrupt my vacations!"

"Yeah! Enough talk, more punching!" Natsu shouted in approval, cracking his fists and sending embers of fire around, making Lucy groan.

"You have my attention, now what?" I asked, narrowing my eyes at the ones before me.

Sho stepped forward, his eyes darkening, his voice cold and detached. "Your friend, Adam."

Adam?

Where's Adam?!

I hadn't even realized he wasn't here until just now.

I had just assumed he was letting us fight, finding no necessity to intervene.

I stiffened.

There was no way they had captured him, or done anything to him. He was much too strong for them, who couldn't even defeat me.

Taking a deep breath, I glared at them as the grip on my sword tightened.

"He's been captured," Sho continued nonchalantly, a cruel twist to his lips.

My heart pounded in my chest like a war drum, each beat echoing the dread that wrapped around me like a shroud.

There's no way Adam had lost.

"Where is he?!" Cana demanded with a low growl, her magic power pulsating in anger.

"Where you ask? Erza knows where, it was after all, a place we once called home. The Tower of Heaven," Simon replied, the name of the dreaded place rolling off his tongue with a disturbing ease.

The Tower of Heaven.

A place filled with nothing but despair and desolation.

A tower built on the tears and screams of countless slaves, innocents. An accursed place that I was all too familiar with, the place I almost lost it all.

"He put up a fight, but in the end, he came up short," Sho snickered.

His words hung in the air, a toxic miasma that seemed to suck away the warmth of the sun.

"Don't keep him waiting, he might suffer more than necessary if you do," Wally, who had been silent until now, added with a twisted smirk.

"See ya there, Erza, and don't forget to bring the blue kitty with you~" Millianna chirped, her voice dripping with sickening sweetness as Sho activated one of his cards, teleporting them away.

Silence. The world seemed to hold its breath, the resort around us falling into a hush that was painfully deafening.

I felt the cool hilt of my sword against my skin, the familiar sensation grounding me. Silently, I gripped it tighter, my knuckles turning white as my magic roared inside me, like tempest waiting to be unleashed.

I turned to my friends.

Their faces were a reflection of my own, etched with worry and anger.

Natsu, his fists clenched, fire dancing in his eyes, mirroring the rage in his heart.

Lucy, her celestial keys clutched tightly in her hand.

Gray, his usually calm demeanor replaced with a hardened expression, his ice magic crackling around him.

Cana, her usual jovial face now stern and focused, filled with rage, more so than anyone here.

Natsu was the first to break the silence, a growl ripping from his throat. "We're getting Adam back," he declared, fire erupting around him. "I don't care who those guys are, or how they know you, Erza, but they messed with the wrong guild!"

I nodded, determination coursing through my veins. "We'll bring him back, no matter what!"

I don't know how they managed to capture Adam, but Natsu was right, they had decided to wage war on the wrong guild, for now, we would stop at nothing to bring them down.

[Juvia Lockser. POV.]

I had come to the resort to make sure my sweet Gray didn't fall in love with anyone else, and if he did, to make sure I killed whoever he fell in love with.

To make sure the last thing those harlots saw was my face, as I drowned them.

However, it wasn't long before my sweet, sweet mission had turned into a fight, as some worms had tried to hurt my Gray, and his companions.

Needless to say, I jumped to the rescue, ready to aid my beautiful love.

And the fight came to an end, these evildoers revealed their intentions. They wanted Erza to come to the Tower of Heaven, and in order to ensure that happened, they had captured Adam, the one who had defeated Master Jose in single combat.

That didn't make sense in Juvia's mind, not at all.

If Adam had defeated Master Jose, there was no way they had the power to defeat Adam.

Perhaps they used dirty tactics to catch him off guard.

Even then, it didn't make a whole lot of sense to Juvia.

"How are we going to find this Tower?" Cana asked, her eyes hard.

"I don't know, but we'll search the entire world if necessary," Erza declared, her face set in a hard expression.

Locating the Tower.

Juvia could help with that.

Perhaps if she did, Gray-sama would give Juvia all of his love.

"The enemies, they smelled like sea water," I spoke up, interrupting the conversation.

Everyone turned to look at me, surprise etched on their faces.

"Sea water?" Lucy repeated, eyebrows knitting together in confusion.

"Yes, Juvia smelled it on them during the fight," I explained. Though, it was a very accurate explanation, it was more like Juvia felt the water in their clothes, tiny bits of salt, and other minerals only found in the sea.

"Oh yeah, now that you mention it, they did smell like sea water," Natsu agreed, scratching his head.

"That only narrows our search to more than half of the world," Cana commented, clearly frustrated.

"In the sea, nothing can escape Juvia's senses," I offered, a small smile forming on my face as I gazed at Gray. "Juvia is confident she can track them."

Being in a large body of water extended Juvia's reach, allowing Juvia to see, feel, and do more than she could normally do.

That, and what everyone already knew about these enemies would make locating the Tower quite easy.

Erza nodded her head, "Then it's settled. Juvia, you'll lead the way."

Gray's face twisted into a scowl, "Or... we could brainstorm a little bit more?"

Juvia's heart sank, why did Gray-sama not trust her? Was Juvia not good enough?

No!

Juvia would show Gray she was the one he had been waiting for.

"Gray, you will come, and that's the end of it, am I clear?" Erza said firmly, her tone leaving no room for argument, making Gray flinch.

"Aye ma'am," Gray muttered, looking away.

[Ultear Milkovich. POV.]

The chill of the marble floor seeped through my boots as I strode through the grand halls of the Magic Council. It seemed we had underestimated our target, a lot.

His 'capture' had been nothing but a farce, a game of chess in which he'd gleefully danced around our pieces. The realization that he'd played us all stirred a pool of anger deep within me, yet it was an anger layered with grudging respect.

He had outwitted us all, turned the tables on our plans for him. I had underestimated him, that much was clear, but that would not happen again.

His escape had not shaken me, though.

Within the walls of the council, there were centuries of magical knowledge, tools, resources that could tip the balance back in our favor.

Adam had proved to be cunning, yes, but he was not the first adversary in this style I had to deal with. I had options to dispose of him, I had power to see it through, and I had a plan.

As I passed the grand doors leading to the Council chambers, a familiar voice broke the silence. "Laria," it called, a tone of concern lacing each syllable.

Laria, the name I was using to avoid dear mom, finding where I was.

Smiling, I turned to see one of the old bastards running the council, his face etched with worry, his glassy eyes gleaming in the dim light.

"How can I be of service?" I replied, watching as the worry in his eyes deepened.

"Siegrain has just informed us about a terrible situation."

I see, so Jellal was planning to use Etherion to deal with Adam, not a bad approach. No matter how strong he is, even he can't face the full might of Etherion.

A flicker of a smile touched my lips. "Allow me to be of service, whatever it is that we are dealing with, will be dealt with accordingly."