Chapter 19: Montague! Maybe! I don’t know! Wait… Sex Montague! That’s totally a thing! That may or may not happen!

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Six years ago:

Issei woke up screaming. And not in the usual semi-comedic way that everyone was used to.

**“Hm? Partner? What’s wrong?”** Ddraig was the first to react before anyone came in the door. **“Did Ghost overdo his training again?”**

*“It’s Thursday Ddraig. He gets to sleep normally tonight.”* Ghost yawned. As overenthusiastic as he technically was while educating the boy in his subconscious at times, even he knew how important a full night of genuine rest could be. Especially for a developing mind like Issei’s. *“Nightmare kid?”*

Issei didn’t say anything, instead settling for hugging his knees to his chest and trying to shut out the world.

That was not normal. Nor a good sign.

*“Kid?”* Ghost’s tone grew slightly more concerned. Child or not, Issei was not one that would withdraw into himself without a damn good reason. *“Hey Ddraig, you catch what he saw while sleeping?”*

**“No. I’ve made it a habit to keep away after his dreams after one almost, ugh, turned me into a female human.”**

That, had been a close one.

That boy’s imagination and conviction to his fantasies was truly a terrifying thing to behold.

A knock on the door interrupted the conversation. “Issei? We heard a scream. Is everything allright? You didn’t experiment with your testicles without supervision and screw up again, did you?” Azazel’s voice came from the other side.

Issei, didn’t react. He just continued to shiver in a cold sweat, staring off at nothing in particular.

*“Hm.”* Normally Ghost was against making things worse whenever someone was having a truly severe mental breakdown, but he needed some extra hands to work with that weren’t stuck in the kid’s soul. *“Something’s up with him. He saw something in his dreams, and he’s more or less nonresponsive. Try coming into the room.”*

“And that will help how?” Azazel’s skepticism was warranted. It was Issei’s room after all.

*“If he reacts, it might be enough to snap him out of his funk. If it doesn’t, then at least we have someone here that can actually help physically.”*

There was a sigh on the other side of the door. Moments later, with some genuine audible hesitancy, it opened to an almost naked Azazel, followed by Vali and a currently visiting Kuroka.

Issei twitched violently, making everyone freeze for a few seconds, but otherwise didn’t respond.

“What got into him?” Vali looked at his friend bewildered. Issei had episodes before but this one was clearly more severe than normal.

**“Nightmare of some kind. Not of the usual stupid kind either. He’d have reacted to us by now.”** Ddraig hummed, concerned. **“There’s clearly a disturbance in his psyche. Something’s twisted him up severely.”**

*“His psyche? We should have noticed if there was something that strong influenced him…”* Ghost hummed. *“Kuroka-chan, can you support him for a bit? I’m going to jump a bit deeper and see what’s going-”*

“…ma.” Issei whimpered, catching them all off guard.

*“He speaks!”* Ghost cheered, immediately back to his usual immature self. “Can you say that a bit louder kid? Kuroka-chan’s here. If you’re good, she’ll let you touch her oppai~.”

The Nekoshou held back a sigh. Ghost wasn’t wrong technically, but she was annoyed that he spoke for her on the matter

“G-Grandma…” Issei whimpered throwing everyone for a loop.

“Grandma?” Vali echoed, confused. “I don’t get it.”

“I don’t either.” Azazel pondered. “From what I recall, all of Issei’s grandparents are dead.”

“I-I s-saw G-Grandma.” Issei shivered uncontrollably. “A-And she saw me.”

*“Grandma… wait. Ah shit.”* Ghost swore.

“Something ring a bell?” Azazel asked.

*“Kid. By Grandma, do you mean big, white, scaly with a faint pinkish rainbow sheen? Pink eyes that replace the horizon? Bigger ego than me? That Grandma?”*

Issei didn’t reply. He only shivered harder.

“Pink white and rainbow?” Vali snorted. “That doesn’t sound too scary.”

*“Yeah well, you’ve never seen a true eldritch horror before.”* Ghost grimaced. *“I was afraid something like this might happen eventually. Kid accidentally dreamed about my boss through me, and she noticed him. Classic case of peering into the abyss bullshit. Problem is that he’s nowhere near conditioned for that level of exposure.”*

“He contacted an *Outer God*?” Azazel paled. The gods that dwelled on this plane of existence were annoying enough at times, but even they avoided the powerhouses on the outside whenever possible.

On a side note, the fact that Ghost technically counted as one himself was nearly perpetually ignored.

*“He contacted THE Outer God as far as you’re concerned, and even that’s a vast understatement. She’s more or less a sentient Omniverse, if you can wrap your heads around that. The fact that his mind is intact despite her noticing him directly can be considered a miracle in itself.”*

Ghost spat irritably. *“Son of a bitch. Ok. Here’s what’s going to happen. I’m going to make a quick trip to the head dragon lady herself to iron this mess out. And before you ask, no I’m not technically leaving the kid’s body so he won’t die from the trip. Just going to use a causality trick to get around that problem for a while. Kuroka, you and Jasmine… wait,”* There was a brief pause as everyone looked around. *“The fuck is Jas?”*

“She should still be here.” Vali frowned. Jasmine was usually one of the first on the scene whenever Issei had an episode. The apartment they were in was a sizeable one, capable of housing a family or more of people if needed. Normally it was just Issei, Azazel, Vali and Jasmine staying inside, but it wasn’t uncommon for guests to stay over on occasion. “She didn’t go to the lab tonight. Last time I saw her was during mail call this afternoon.”

“N-Nee-san?” Issei looked around as if he was a lost child looking for his missing favorite stuffed toy.

“Do you think something is wrong, nya?” Kuroka looked slightly worried.

“We’ll find out soon enough.” Azazel turned for her room. “Issei. Something might have happened to Jasmine. She might need your help.”

Surprisingly, the boy didn’t immediately burst into flaming action hell bent on purging whoever was stupid enough to hurt Jasmine. He did however, stagger unsteadily to his feet and stumble his way with a fair bit of unhinged anger like a particularly motivated zombie.

Kuroka instantly grabbed onto Issei from behind and pressed her chest into his back to calm him down some. The action worked to a degree, but instantly caused the Nekoshou to flinch and almost retreated a second later. “Nya?! Oh my. Ghost was nyat stretching the truth. Issei’s ki is all over the place. It actually shocked me.”

“That bad?” Vali blinked. “Damn. That grandma really must be something crazy…”

*“Don’t even think about it.”* Albion chided firmly. *“If even a fraction of what my instincts tell me of our Great Grandmother is true, then you’d wipe out our entire reality as a consequence for your thirst for battle. Dragons are a prideful race, but even we know a lost battle when we see one. If just looking at her drove your rival to this state, imagine what it would do to you.”*

“Tch. Fine.” Vali huffed.

*“If you’re that eager to have your ass kicked pointlessly later, I’ll introduce you to a chicken that’ll do the job just fine later. For now I’ll have to leave you guys to it. Ddraig, you keep the kid’s mind intact from the inside. Everyone with tits, smother him. Everyone without tits, don’t get in the way with the people with tits.”* Ghost instructed with a firm tone that caught most by surprise. It wasn’t often that he actually took charge of anything that wasn’t Issei’s training.

“Are you sure this boss of yours will listen to you?” Azazel probed. “You’ve complained about her enough, and from what I understand Eldritch entities aren’t exactly the most negotiable or coherent of beings.”

*“She’ll listen. Outside of her direct family, I’m the only being that’s ever managed to put her existence in genuine danger in a straight fight.”*

The Fallen’s eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Despite the grandeur of that claim, you don’t seem to be proud of that accomplishment.”

Indeed, Ghost’s tone had been remarkably neutral during the previous statement.

The room was ominously quiet for several seconds.

*“… Let’s just say that it wasn’t a good day for anyone.”*

Before anyone could reply to that disturbingly ominous statement, the slight pressure that indicated Ghost’s presence faded away. It didn’t take much for them to figure out that he had already left.

Azazel scratched his chin skeptically. “Well that was rather unsettling. Regardless, I suppose he’s left us to our own devices now. First thing’s first, Issei and Jasmine.”

“N-Nee-san.” Issei mumbled absently as he stumbled out of the room and moved straight to Jasmine’s, barely paying attention to the others there.

“Wow, he’s really out of it this time. I know we’ve joked about it before, but I think there’s seriously something wrong with him.” Vali grimaced.

“Recent unexpected exposure to an Outer God aside, we’ve suspected as much for a while already.” Azazel admitted. Dragon or not, Issei was a unique case that would catch anyone’s attention sooner or later. But so long as he wasn’t a danger to himself or anyone else (that was important), it was always put off as a secondary issue.

While they were bantering, Issei opened the door to Jasmine’s room and walked in. “Nee-san?”

Surprising enough, Jasmine was actually still inside and awake. She was sitting on her bed with an opened letter in her hand, dressed in sweat pants and a tank top.

What was out of the norm though was her disheveled state of her hair and the running smear of makeup down her cheeks indicating that she had been crying.

Jasmine never cried.

“Issei?” She croaked awkwardly. It was as if her voice was simultaneously worn and abused, yet still in immaculate shape. No doubt her Sacred Gear had prevented her throat from falling apart in her distress. “Sorry, but, I’m not in the mood for people right now…”

The boy didn’t seem to hear her as he stumbled faster towards her, half tackling and half collapsing into her lap to wrap his arms around her waist in a death grip.

“Wh-what the?! Issei! I told you I’m not in the mood right now!” She growled with more force.

“Jas.” Kuroka stepped in with concern. “He actually nyeeds you this time. He saw something through Ghost that he shouldn’t have. Bad enough that even Ghost took it seriously. I couldn’t calm him down myself.”

“…Mm’sry.” Issei whimpered into her stomach, shivering enough for everyone to see.

Jasmine clearly looked like she wanted to be anywhere else for a moment, but gave up just as quickly. What was surprising was the helpless expression she had doing so. “Fine. Fine. It’s not like I have anything better to do…”

“Jasmine, I know I’m prying but what’s wrong?” Azazel asked, clearly concerned. “Something’s clearly happened.”

“How kind of you to notice.”

“You’re normally quiet when you have some time to yourself. You’re not however the type that makes a habit of crying or locking yourself in for half a day with a letter in hand.” The Fallen nodded his head to the missive she was still holding.

The teen opened her mouth to rebuke him harshly, but paused as she noticed the worried looks she was getting, even from Kuroka. She wanted to yell at them. She wanted to be alone. But even if she could kick them out, she couldn’t get rid of Issei. Not now. And they’d find out eventually regardless.

She let out a bitter mix of laughter, reluctance, anger, and resignation as she shook her head and leaned back on her bed to stare up at the ceiling. Her hands snaking around Issei to hug him close for her own personal comfort.

“… I just got a letter. My dad he, he killed himself last week.”

The room was dead quiet.

“He, uh. He tried to reenlist for another tour and got denied. Too old for general duties, no real specialties. Not leader material. Not organized enough for management. And he never was one to rub shoulders. Not with the higher ranks that gave a damn at least. But military life was all he really knew, and I guess it was too much for him. Rejection letter in one hand. Nine millimeter in the other.”

She was clearly trying to make it sound like it wasn’t a big deal, but even Hellen Keller could tell that she wasn’t taking it well.

“We didn’t get along that well to begin with. And things got worse when we learned that mom died. I ran away from home a bit after that. Even so, when I got accepted here I sent him messages to tell him where I was. What I was doing. Told him I was going legit. Going to be a successful member of society just like he kept on bitching to me about when I was a brat. Strike it rich. Have a house. Never have to answer to anyone. Be my own boss so I could order him around for once ‘cause I did own the place. He sent a couple back, but they were always halfhearted. Just like when we were together. I thought that he… I didn’t think that he would… that him being gone would…”

Jasmine couldn’t string together her words right as tears started to fall down her cheeks and she hunched over to hug Issei tighter, who in turn held her more in kind.

“We should leave.” Azazel advised Kuroka and Vali, already slowly walking backwards out the room. “We’ll come back later to check up on you two.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Vali all but whispered. “Neither of them are…”

“Sometimes that’s exactly why they should be left be.” Kuroka chided softly, urging him out firmly. “We’ll have our turn eventually. Just not now.”

The boy looked like he wanted to say something more, but a last glance at Jasmine and Issei hugging one another killed his motivation to do so.

Soon enough, it was just Jasmine and Issei on the former’s bed quietly comforting one another.

“Never thought I’d be saying this to a ten year old kid, but you’re all I have left now Issei.” Jasmine mumbled into the top of his head. “How pathetic am I?”

“I shouldn’t be. You deserve more.” Issei replied, his mind and body were exhausted but his confidence still enabled his words to come out calm and firm, if a bit weak.

“You’re too good to me. Really.” She let out a bitter laugh and hugged him even tighter. “… Issei? Be honest. Why did you so convinced that I was worth going after even when I turned you down?”

There was a long pause before he answered. Long enough that for a moment Jasmine suspected that the boy had lost himself in the comfort of their hold for a moment. “… Dunno. Could just, tell, you were worth it. That you were special, and you needed someone. That you’d be happy if I was around.”

“That’s some impressive gut feeling you have.” She didn’t even try to deny it. “I miss him Issei. I didn’t even know I did until I read the letter. I didn’t know that he was even that bad…”

“It’s not your fault. It’s not his. It’s not anyone’s. Nobody has to be at fault.” The boy reasoned, burying his head deeper into Jasmine’s cleavage having shifting his skull up there sometime over the past few minutes. It wasn’t for perverted comfort or thrill, but out of necessity. His mind kept on flashing with images that confused and horrified him. Jasmine’s comfort, her love, as depressed as it was right now, was the only thing that kept him thinking rationally right now.

“I should have been there.”

“No. You’ve always been right where you’ve needed to be. You tried to talk to him, even when you didn’t have to. It’s not your fault.” Issei chided. “I’ll call mom and dad later. They can help. You’re their family too.”

“You, really see me as family?”

“Don’t ask stupid questions Nee-san.”

“… Sorry.”

The two rested in her bed in silence, drawing comfort and stability from one another.

“Issei?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks for caring about me.”

“Mmm.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too Nee-san.”

It was the first time Jasmine had ever said those words to him. They both know she would never utter them half-heartedly to anyone.

Just as the boy was relaxing, a flash of pink literally *seared* the inside of his mind, making him shiver and tighten his hold on her.

“Issei? What happened?”

“I accidentally saw Grandma through Ghost. Scary.”

“Grand… you mean that super Dragon God that Ophis goes on about?”

“Really scary.”

“Wasn’t it just a dream?”

“Gods can talk to people through dreams. Nothing says they can’t notice when people start it from their side by accident.” He reasoned.

“… Can’t argue with that.” She held him tighter. “So she’s too much woman for even you huh? Like Tiamat?”

“No. Tia wants me because we match well. I’m her ideal mate. Grandma wants me because of *pride*.”

“Pride?”

“I *looked* at *her*. Not at the image she makes to talk to people normally.” He shivered more. “No one’s supposed to do that without her permission. It’s not right. I’m just me. I don’t have the right. The Authority. The…”

“Shh. Shh. It’s ok. It’s ok.” She comforted Issei as he began to shake almost uncontrollably.

She didn’t understand a fraction of the “God” related stuff that Ghost taught Issei, but she knew enough to know that breaking taboos tended to result in people being driven insane.

Or reality twisting on itself.

Or the world ending in some capacity.

It was usually at least one of those three things.

“I’m guessing Ghost is trying to fix things now? Is that why he hasn’t said anything yet?”

“Mmm.”

“Well at least he’s being productive and quiet for a change.” She sighed. As the seconds and minutes drew out, she felt the exhaustion she had been fighting all day in her grief finally start to catch up to her. “Hey Issei, do you want me to sing you to sleep?”

“No. Can’t sleep. Not yet.” His denial surprised her. Issei rarely ever turned down an offer from her to take a nap.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ll see *Grandma* again if I sleep now. I can feel it.” He shivered in fear again.

“You’re not going to tell me next that she wants to jump you like Tia does, are you?” Jasmine half joked, half prayed.

“N-no. She just wants to kill me.” Issei clarified, also horrified at the mere idea of that monster wanting to jump his bones.

Technically, she wanted to “correct his existence”, but it more or less meant the same thing.

“Well that’s a relief.” Even Jas couldn’t tell if she was joking or being serious. Still it didn’t stop her from gently stroking Issei’s head to calm him down. “Shh. It’s fine. I’m here Issei. I’m here.”

“Mm’srry.” He mumbled. “I should be helping you right now.”

“It’s fine. You’re helping just by being here.”

“… Really?”

Jasmine didn’t know why, but that single worded question felt heavier than it had any right to be. There was just so much hope, gratification, and pure unadulterated *relief* in it that she had to take a moment to make sure that she had heard it right.

“Yeah.”

Much to her surprise, he didn’t say anything. Instead, all the energy in his body just seemed to ebb away, and he started to cry into her chest.

It wasn’t long until she started to cry too.

An hour later, Ophis barged into the room asking to talk to Grandma.

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