

[Adam POV]

The wind howled past me like a banshee as I moved, blurring in and out of sight through the vast plains of empty terrain behind Magnolia Town, a place that held a kind of peace, and a wonderful calmness, that allowed me to forget about my cares and worries, and focus on my own personal journey.

Gripping the hilt of my Zanpakuto tightly, the air crunched and shifted beneath my feet as I continued to train, as the sun shone brightly in the sky, its light glinting off the blade in my hands.

For the last few days since my return to Magnolia, I had focused on my training, day in and day out, all in order to hone my skills even further, pushing myself to my very limits.

This wasn't the only thing I was doing though, sure it was what covered most of my time, but it wasn't the only thing.

As per Makarov's orders, I was keeping it easy.

Socializing with the guild, instead of going out on missions.

Besides, it wasn't like I really needed the money from the missions, seeing I had saved more than enough to not have to work for quite a while.

"Big brother!"

Hearing Cana, I lowered my blade, and slowly turned on my heel, feeling the warm droplets of sweat trickling down my face and neck, the result of hours of hard work, only to see the mischievous little girl racing across the sweat/blood-covered ground towards me, holding a picnic basket with bright eyes and an elated smile that lit up her entire face, her pigtails bouncing with each stride she took.

"What are you doing here?" I dropped to one knee, smiling at her as she tackled me into a tiny but unbreakable hug.

"I wanted to have lunch with you!" Cana replied excitedly, with a cute, little nod, as she held her picnic basket aloft, her eyes twinkling with joy as she added. "Mom made lots of yummy food! Sandwiches, cookies...and more sandwiches! Won't you join me?"

I chuckled. "Sure, I was getting hungry anyways."

Cana beamed at my response with excitement, grabbing my hand and dragging me towards the picnic blanket she had laid out before calling out my name.

As we ate, played, and chatted, the sun began to set, casting a warm orange glow across the fields, as I watched Cana playing

with her cookies, making little cookie towers and giggling at her own creations.

Soon enough without even realizing it, the sun fell toward the horizon, and the wind picked up with a cold chill, making it obvious I had lost track of time. "Cana, it's getting late. We should get you back home."

Cana pouted, crossing her arms. "But I don't want to leave yet."

My hands lightly ruffled her chestnut-colored hair, and I smiled down at her. Her small face was full of disappointment, but I could tell she knew I was right. "We can always have another picnic another day," I said with a wink. "But for now, we need to get going."

"Fine... but you better make right on your promise!" Cana said, sticking her tongue out playfully as we packed up the picnic basket and started walking back toward town.

As we walked, I couldn't help but think about how happy Cana seemed nowadays. It was moments like these that made all the hard work worth it.

Hell, I would even dare to say that taking a break from missions and focusing on training, and spending time with the guild was exactly what I needed.

As we reached Cana's home, I gave her a hug and waved goodbye, not before letting her mom know that she had been with me all day, in case she was worrying about her, which I doubted seeing the amount of food she had cooked for Cana's picnic, but still, it felt like the responsible thing to do.

With that out of the way, I started making my way toward my apartment, walking down the mostly empty streets of Magnolia, until an old friend materialized in front of me, holding a beaming smile. "You look better."

"Mavis, you still here? Hm, I was starting to think you finally moved on," I replied with a light chuckle.

At this, Mavis pouted, wrapping her arms around herself and sticking out her bottom lip. "That's not very nice!"

"I'm just joking," I chuckled.

Mavis broke into a grin. "I know, I know. So, how's life treating you?"

"It's been good," I said with a shrug. "Just been focusing on training and spending time with the guild. Got to admit, it's been a nice change of pace."

Mavis nodded. "That's great to hear. You deserve a break every now and then."

I smiled. "Thanks. I appreciate it."

There was a brief moment of silence between us, as Mavis fidgeted with the ends of her hair. It was always nice to see her, I had grown fond of her.

Eventually, as we continued walking, Mavis' gaze dropped to the floor, and her voice took on a different tone, as she softly apologized, "I'm sorry I wasn't there when you needed me." Her eyes lifted to meet mine, a hint of sadness, and guilt, still lingering in them.

"Don't be," I waved her off. "It wasn't even that bad, I went all dark for like a day or two. Besides, you probably had your own things to deal with, so don't worry. In any case, I never held it against you, hell, I was glad you weren't there."

Mavis narrowed her eyes at the part, before letting out a sigh. "But I feel like I should have been there for you! It is Fairy Tail's law number eighty-two!"

"Wait, you mean to tell me there's actually a set of rules in the guild?" I replied in an incredulous tone.

Mavis grinned. "Of course there are! And law eighty-two clearly states that 'Fairy Tail members shall always stand by and protect, help, or beat their comrades, no matter the cost!' So, I should have been there for you!"

I don't know why I feel she made that up right now, yet, at the same time, somehow... it felt like it could actually exist.

I rolled my eyes playfully. "Oh, I see, in that, I think I'll forgive you this time."

Mavis giggled. "Don't worry, it won't happen again! This time I'm not going anywhere! I promise."

"What?!" I tried to keep my voice even and light, but the sarcasm leaked through like cold water through a punctured hose. "Hey, that's not fair," I said, smothering a groan, trying to make it sound like her company would be the worst punishment imaginable. "I already have punishment in place, there's no need for another!"

Mavis laughed, her eyes bright with amusement as she dried fake tears from her totally real, not faked, heartbroken expression. "Oh, I see how it is. You don't want me around, huh? Well, in that case, I will make sure to be with you 24/7!"

"Oh no, the agony!" I chuckled.

Mavis giggled again. "Say what you want, but I know you like having me around."

I rolled my eyes but couldn't help the smile that tugged at my lips. "Fine, fine, you win. But only because I can't resist your ghostly charm, that... and because there isn't any ad-blocker that works against you."

Mavis flashed me a mischievous grin, "Indeed, you can't get rid of me!"

As the months rolled by in the tranquility of my unpaid leave, the waves of change reached the Guild in small portions.

For one, Rob officially retired, or rather re-retired, buying a home on the outskirts of Magnolia with a large sum of money Makarov had given him.

Besides that, there was also the fact that Erza had officially joined the guild after finally having unlocked her magic thanks to Rob's and Makarov's guidance.

As I remembered from the anime, one of Erza's most prominent personality traits was her unwavering sense of

discipline and dedication to the guild, a trait that was already showing in a strong manner despite her young age.

If I had to describe her, based on my interactions with her so far, I would say without a doubt that she was a socially awkward, but strict and uncompromising girl, who strived to always follow the rules, while expecting others to do the same.

At the same time, however, despite her social awkwardness, and strict behavior it was easy to see that she was also a deeply empathetic person, one who was in tune with the emotions and feelings of those around her, giving her the ability to pick up on the subtle cues behind someone's behavior, allowing her to sense if said person was struggling or in need of help.

My relationship with her was... odd, and this didn't mean it was necessarily bad. Just... strange.

For one, she admired me, or at least the image she had of me, the one that had managed to escape the living hell no one before me had, the hero that had saved everyone.

Not only that but seeing our past was similar, at least to an extent, she saw me as a kindred spirit of sorts, someone who had also faced the same struggles she had and managed to come out on the other side.

In a way, I was her only outlet when it came to our past. Even though she had Rob, it seemed that it was easier for her to open up about the Tower with me.

Perhaps it was the fact I was closer to her in terms of age that made it easier for her to talk about that with me, or the fact that I had escaped... or the fact I had freed her from the Tower, I really didn't know.

Or perhaps, just perhaps, she knew that on some level, like her, she thought I needed someone to talk to about that chapter of my life, and in her own way, she wanted to be there for me.

Either way, the point was that our friendship was strange, but also comforting in a way.

Though I really needed to talk with her about not breaking my door open every time she comes to visit.

I can't have the landlord increase my rent anymore.

"Oh well, time to take a nap," I yawned, pushing my thoughts aside for the moment.

However, before I could reach my room in order to get some well-deserved sleep, Erza burst into my apartment, breaking my door open, clad in a full suit of armor, her vibrant red hair cascading past her shoulders and a wooden practice sword in

hand. "Adam! There's no time to rest! Let us train in the way of the sword, together!"

"Could you stop doing that!" I sighed in exasperation, pointing at the door she had broken.

Almost as if on cue, Lilia crashed through my window, landing in my living room, in a kneeling position, as shattered glass rained down onto the carpet. "Adam-sama! I heard yelling, are you okay?!"

"Could everyone stop breaking my stuff!" I groaned, exasperated.

"Hmm, it might be best if you start looking for another place to rent..." Mavis muttered, watching everything unfold with a mischievous smile.

If this continues, I will get evicted.

Part of my leasing contract stated I couldn't be friends, or be related to Gildarts in any shape or form.

The Famously known, Gildarts Clause.

I managed to avoid getting evicted thanks to a lot of legal technicalities, but... well, I doubt I will avoid a fucking eviction if this shit continues.

Erza looked at me, her eyes wide with excitement as she walked over the pieces of my door, entering my apartment. "But Adam! How can we stop?! We simply can't! We must train! We have to prepare for any upcoming battles!"

I sighed, rubbing my temple. "Erza for the love of... it's Sunday.... my day off. Can't we train another day?"

Erza shook her head. "No, we can't! As a member of Fairy Tail and a master of the sword, you can never truly have a day off! For we must always be ready to protect our comrades and fight for what we believe in. So come on! Let's train!"

Is every shy person I meet turn crazy?

Is it me?

Am I the fucking problem?

Before I could ponder on that thought any much longer, the walls of my apartment shook violently for a moment almost as if an earthquake had struck the area, until one of the walls leading into the hallway began to crack and split apart into dozens of tiny cubes.

Of course...

Why the fuck not.

"Hey brat," Gildarts said entering through the now-broken wall, a smile on his face.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, rubbing my temples.

"Just wanted to see if you had any sugar," Gildarts replied nonchalantly, his smile turning into a cheeky grin as he walked toward my kitchen to check for the damn sugar.

However, before I could reply, almost as if on cue, the landlord appeared at my door, watching the place in shock, before taking a few tentative steps into the apartment, his eyes drawn to the gaping hole in the wall and shattered window. "What in God's name happened here?!" he exclaimed, his voice filled with total disbelief until he noticed Gildarts was there. "Never mind I take back my question."

"I'll be out by the end of the week," I sighed.

"I will mail you the cost of the... repairs," The landlord nodded, his eyes flicking over to Gildarts who was now enjoying a cup of coffee as if nothing had happened.

"Please do," I sighed.

I guess it's time I get my own place, I mean, I can't really rent a place when I'm surrounded by people that embody the concept of destruction as comic relief.