

## Fate/Bonds Beyond Humanity

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### 73- The King's Sword: Old and New

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Mornings were usually hectic in his home but Shirou had already grown used to it a long time ago. Not only had he grown up with parents who were absolute disasters on house chores but he also had to compete with an over competent maid while taking care of a lazier one.

Not even mentioning his sister who was a hyper competent 'scientist' but worse than their father in a kitchen and more lazy than Leysritt when it came to anything that didn't involve fun, research or playing a prank at his expense.

Point was that Shirou knew his way around a messy morning and since his new home gained new residents he could easily adapt to a greater number of people.

Rias didn't have that advantage. "Good grief, oh Goetia, have mercy." She mumbled while jumping from the oven to the sink where a bowl waited to be prepared. "Did they already?"

"Woke up?" Shirou commented while leaning to the side at the door. "Needing some help?"

A part of the Heiress wanted to tell the magus to get more sleep. "Had to go buy more ingredients. Really wasn't expecting to have to cook extra yesterday." But she really, really wanted some assistance.

"Hey, I was the one who cooked too much... to be fair I expected something surviving for today but..." Also they had visits and leaving their best cook on the bench would be rude. "Let me take care of the meat and rice. You get the salad and desserts-"

"While I have the tea, juices and set up the plates." Akeno leaned forward into the kitchen before striding inside with all her confidence. "Good lord, I never thought we would be facing this sort of situation. At least not when Yoruichi isn't around."

"We finally found someone that can out eat Koneko fair and square." Shirou pointed out with newborn respect, not counting the dragon he had to feed in the Underworld. Never had he seen one person eat so much and so elegantly. The food from the previous night had vanished in minutes. "How is Kiba, by the way? Did he already wake up?"

"Yes, I did." Called out the Knight as he also stepped in the kitchen. He didn't even bother offering to help, just grabbing the dishes. "Don't worry about me... I already moved on from the Excalibur deal."

“Good.” After the previous day Shirou certainly didn’t want to fight first thing in the morning. “Sorry, it was just... well, you were-”

“It is fine. I get it.” The blond stopped with a smile as Akeno passed him several cups while meeting his eyes.

“Are you sure?” The Queen asked carefully, a hand landing on Kiba’s. “Because nobody is going to blame you for being a tad upset.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Rias stopped for a moment to ask as Shirou took over her workstation. “We know that you have already moved on but...”

“That doesn’t mean this is easy.” The Mage concluded, his lover returning to the salad as he turned Kiba while Akeno went to boil water. “I still have problems walking around some parts of the city. Nobody here is going to think less of you.” The women nodded in agreement.

A sigh later, Kiba replied. “I already said that I am fine. My problem really was with Valper and not with the sword.” He could see the relief on the redhead magus’ shoulder and decide to ask. “Would it even make any difference if I said that I didn’t want that sword completed?”

Surprisingly that question made even Rias and Akeno pause while Shirou didn’t hesitate to shake his head, getting back to work. “Absolutely not. I would still reforge it but... I would feel extra awful about it.”

Kiba smiled at his friend and patted his shoulder. “Thanks but I am cool.” The three looked at him with obvious concern. “Really, I am fine. Promise.” He then noticed the several dishes being cooked at the same time and chuckled. “Do any of you have time to worry about me considering our guest’s appetite?” Rias doubled her efforts as the Mage could only shake his head with acceptance before getting back to work. “Want me to go get some extra food?”

“No but maybe you can go to the store when coming back from school?” Rias asked while focusing on her dish. “I had to buy extra already but the pantry is kinda low.”

Akeno giggled at the notion. “I shall repeat it; I didn’t expect that to happen without Yoruichi around.” She saw Shirou’s stiff back and couldn’t help but whisper. “Wonder what we are going to do if she shows up today~”

“Call for more cooks or delivery.” The Mage of Swords declared with conviction because despite his high skill in the kitchen even he had to admit he couldn’t cook enough for so many by himself. At least not without extra time or a bigger oven. “Either that or delay breakfast.”

All amusement left Akeno and she gulped. “We will have a riot.”

“Or a revolution.” Rias shivered in fear. “Probably both.”

“Isn’t one kinda predicated by the other?” Asked the Knight while balancing the dishes in his hands. “Either way, with you three working together that probably isn’t going to happen.”

Jokes aside, Kiba moved to set the table and found Luvia, Xenovia and Gasper already sitting down. The bluehead had dragged the Bishop from his room but he could tell her movements were slow and deliberate. While she had been fully healed some of her muscles were still sore due to the drain of using Durandal at full throttle for as long as she did.

Still the young woman managed to march with a perfect stride, dropping the former dhampir in his place before turning to her friend. "Morning, Kiba."

"Good morning, Yuuto." The former Heiress of Edelfelt said offhandedly but respectfully as she focused on reading a book about Greek 'mythology'.

"Good morning." He said to all before focusing on Xenovia. "Feeling better?"

"Stiff and hungry as hell so yeah, way better." Her nose twitched and she smiled. "Good goodness for breakfast. Oi, Gasper! Wake up!" She hit the back of his head.

Which worked like a charm. "Am awake! Am awake!" Calming himself down, the former dhampir fixed his uniform before pouting at Xenovia. "Boo. Did you need to do that?"

"Start sleeping early and I won't." She rebutted easily before wincing a little, making both blonds frown.

"She is quite correct, Gasper. You need to 'man up' as they say." Luvia flipped a page carefully before frowning. Despite being one of the most precise books that separated fantasy from reality, it held nothing of what she was looking for.

"No clues yet?" Kiba asked his fellow peerage member.

His fellow blond closed the book loudly. "To be fair I doubt we are going to find how to kill a god in a book."

"The internet has nothing on it either... nothing serious, that is." Gasper informed the others helpfully. "Just a bunch of forums about games and stuff."

The former Exorcist patted his head before wincing. "If it was that easy everyone would do it."

"Problems with the arm?" Asked the Knight.

Xenovia shook her head and moved the limb around a few times. "More with the shoulder but it is just muscular fatigue. Holding back an attack the size of a train was a bit too much." Her hand rested on Durandal once again around her neck. "Couldn't have done it without my Noble Gear but," she let out a sigh, "maybe if I knew how to fly better I could have used more leverage and would hurt less."

Shirou, Rias and Akeno enter the room with the dishes which had everybody's mouth water. "Asia can take a look at it later if you want." Recommended the Heiress. "By the way, are you two going to school today?"

Her lover fixed some of the dishes on the table before shaking his head. "Maybe later but not for classes. I have a promise to keep." He saw Leysritt and Koneko make their way inside the kitchen and once everyone greeted each other he asked, "So where are our guests?"

"Guest rooms." Koneko informed as her hand went to prepare her dish only for Akeno to send a spark at it, holding her back.

"Then we wait until they are here." The Queen announced as she stood up. "I will check them out."

"No need." Medusa entered the room with the Pendragon siblings in tow, the older one walking inside regally while the younger was pouting a little. "I guessed they were waiting for someone to get them and made a small detour."

Altria cleared her throat as she approached the table, not sitting down despite the goddess and her sister doing so. "We are not only guests but also enemy combatants. No matter the circumstances, we should be watched at all times."

"Ria... nobody was watching us sleep. Not even the snakes around the place." Le Fay pointed out as she turned to Koneko and lowered her head. "Thank you for the clothes as well. Don't worry, I promise to return them washed and pressed."

Koneko looked at her black light dress top with paw prints on the shoulders and the skirt that reached the other girl's knees with a nod. "No problem."

"Either way, it is only proper for us to respect the owners of the house, Fay." Altria said firmly, turning to Shirou and Rias. "As enemies or allies, they were kind enough to let us rest for the night and even provide us with clothes."

Those clothes were a blue knee length skirt with black tights to cover her legs, a white shirt matched with a blue string tie and brown boots that would be ideal for a rainy day full of mud.

Xenovia waved her good arm away. "Don't think too much about it. That is a set that Rias bought for me and I wasn't going to use anyway."

"But you are so cute with the 'reserved school girl' aesthetic! It practically makes you shine!" Rias complained before rubbing her chin and looking at Altria who involuntarily took a step back. "Then again... It looks way better on her. I mean, way, way better."

The Hybrid approached the taller Pendragon from the side and made a show of studying her closely. "Fufufu. Buchou is absolutely correct. Not in the same level of your school uniform but still.

Seeing Altria blush had Luvia also standing up and studying the girl closely. "I wonder how well you would look in Kuoh's school uniform. Unlike Asia who can pull off a completely innocent air, I think it would look rather daring to you."

"I think it would be more like the forbidden fruit for the male population." Akeno added to rile the younger woman up but she looked at Shirou for support.

And the Mage of Swords moved to save her. "You girls know we can't eat unless everyone is sitting down, right?" Almost like magic, everyone was already in position. Everyone but Altria. "You can sit down as well."

Le Fay rolled her eyes as her sister lowered her head slightly. "I thank you for your kindness." Only then did Altria sit down with a graceful posture that even Rias and Luvia had a hard time to match. "And once again I thank you for receiving us in your home and allowing us to rest."

"Our brother is going to be really frustrated when we get back home to say the least." The smaller Pendragon pointed out as her sister nodded in agreement.

"Nevertheless we needed the rest and still have business so leaving and coming back would be counterproductive... especially since he is going to be frustrated either way when Zolgen's death comes out."

Both Pendragon siblings knew Arthur was clever enough to figure out they had something to do with it no matter when the Mage's demise was revealed back in the Khaos Brigade's headquarters. At least he would suspect as knew about Le Fay's familiars watching the man, her distaste for him and their abstinence during the time of his death.

Neither would be surprised if he knew something already which was another reason to not get back as they would be 'grounded' for a while once Arthur got his hands on them.

"So thank you for giving us time to gather our thoughts and rest properly." Altria lowered her head to both Shirou and then Rias, the latter paying close attention to the girl even as she fixed the food on the table.

While nothing happened the previous night, the two had been too tired to have any fun, her lover had told the Heiress his suspicions about the blond girl's identity.

*"Avalon saved my life." He had said as he sat down in seiza position on repentance about the mistakes he made during the fight which almost killed him. Forgetting his armor was inexcusable, exhaustion or not but in the end they reached the topic he really wanted to talk about. "Actively and without any prompt from myself. Avalon has always been capable of it but I never could use it. I still can't... not unless Altria is around."*

The implications were pretty staggering but at the same time the Heiress found herself wishing to know more about the apparently reborn King. "Pretty sure we already said you don't need to be so formal." Rias pointed out.

“It would be improper. Even if you don’t suspect us of foul play, we should still act as proper guests.” Altria replied gently with an honest smile which baffled Rias.

‘Does she realize she is basically giving us authorization to lock her up whenever we feel like it? This isn’t a prison but it is like she is following the rules of one...’

Noticing her friend’s confusion, the goddess offered her own insight. “She seems naturally geared towards acting as honorable as possible even to her detriment.” Medusa had found the older Pendragon in the middle of the guest room in light mediation.

Much like many in the house she had woken up with the dawn but besides using the facilities in her room, she hadn’t made a single effort to leave until someone went fetch her. The goddess truly didn’t have a single snake in those rooms watching the girls but her children were keeping an eye on the area so she was aware of their every move.

She knew that the younger sibling was more reluctant to stay put as the two talked through the walls and the older one insisted they had to wait for their hosts. They didn’t fight over the subject but the conversation had been early enough that Medusa knew only a few people got up first and it would be hours before anyone showed up.

Yet Altria preached patience leaving Le Fay to play with some magic circles, teleporting things in and out of her room. Nothing dangerous, obviously, or else Medusa would have personally gone in her room and made the girl regret her life choices. Except she didn’t go despite the magic circles because Altria’s whole disposition made the goddess wish to give them the benefit of the doubt.

What the goddess also noticed was that the younger sister was far more careful than the older and far more suspicious. Acting cautiously in enemy territory was expected but Medusa was sure Le Fay had something to hide and it had nothing to do with the Khaos Brigade.

“Why don’t you try and enjoy your childhood a little.” The purple haired goddess suddenly commented as everyone else prepared to eat. “You should be playing around instead of throwing yourself with a group like yours or picking fights with century old Mages.”

Le Fay glanced at Medusa with a calculated expression before summoning a witch’s hat and covering her eyes. “That is none of your business, goddess-sama.”

Any further conversation was cut short when the redheads returned to the room with a pot full of several meats that exuded a smell so good that everyone’s mouths were watering.

“Breakfast is served~” Rias announced as she stepped back and allowed Shirou to place it at the center of the table. “See how it is good to wait?”

““Buchou is cruel.”” Liz and Koneko said at the exact same time, making some at the table laugh.

“Yes, yes. We are so cruel for setting the table first before you girls make a mess.” Shirou couldn’t help but say but the white haired maidens met his gaze shamelessly. Deliberately slowly he took his seat, watching as three people squirmed to not eat immediately. “Well-”

“Don’t forget to give thanks for the food first~” Of course any light teasing would get Akeno’s attention and the Queen loved how Liz and Koneko froze mid-motion to grab the food.

She didn’t blame them, it was the first time Shirou properly cooked in a while and those two were barely controlling themselves. It was just an extra second to say thanks but then everyone started eating.

Then the competition began to who was going to have the most food and already several eyes were on the elegant blond who expertly filled her plate with several foods despite clearly not being practiced on the use of hashi.

Of them all were Rias and Luvia who admired her movements the most as Altria not only made a very colorful plate she also had contracted it with a little of everything without spilling despite how full it was.

Then when Pendragon began to eat her food it was also with a poise that gave her an air compared to Medusa’s. Sure the goddess had her own disposition to help her out and Altria had no Charm magic in herself but everything she did was an undeniable grace.

‘She undoubtedly was raised as a noble and yet...’ Luvia watched as Le Fay ate much more normally with a fork and knife, not even bothering to try and adapt. While there was a similar grace in the girl there was also aloofness. ‘Altria doesn’t need to try to be graceful while Le Fay showed that she could but won’t bother but even as they move shows different upbringings...’

Another thing she found impressive was how fast Altria was while devouring her food, not losing to anyone at the table at all. In fact she remembered Yoruichi eating and even if the woman was proclaimed as the fastest, when it came to eating with elegance, another held the title.

While the newest Rook of Gremory tried to piece together the puzzle that was the Pendragon sisters, everyone else made plans for their day. “So are you going to school so Asia can take a look at that shoulder or not?”

Hearing Kiba’s question, Shirou froze mid bite and after swallowing his food he asked an irritated Xenovia who was busy glaring at the Knight, “Your shoulder is still hurt?”

“It is nothing, Master. I can still do my duties and-”

“I can watch him today.” Liz interceded as she refilled her plate.

“Sensei, you have classes today as well- Ow!” Gasper reminded the maid who hit the back of his head before resuming her meal.

“Someone needs to keep an eye on Shirou.” She said after a few more bites which made the redhead roll his eyes.

Only for Akeno to quickly raise her hand. “Oh, oh. I volunteer.”

“Aren’t you already back in school?”

“My, my, Shirou-kun. Don’t be upset. I can send my familiar and skip a day or two easily.”

Clicking his tongue the Mage rebutted with, “You are already in uniform.”

“Unfortunately you will but not to take care of Shiro here. You and Medusa are with me today.” Which had both goddess and priestess stop to look at the Heiress. “We have some work to do because of the extermination last night.”

“We have?” Medusa asked with interest and Rias nodded enthusiastically. “Whatever you need help with I don’t mind but I don’t know what I can help with if the man is already dead. Literally not my department.”

“Don’t call him a man.” Xenovia said with fury. “He was an evil creature that needed to be put down.”

“I agree with her.” Altria stopped eating for a moment to say that before refilling her plate with expert precision. Before taking another bite she turned to Shirou. “And why do you need someone to keep an eye on you? Is it because you are helping us today?”

“Do not think too much about it, lady Pendragon.” Luvia said with a confident smile. “We keep an eye on Shero because if we don’t he will get into some trouble without backup. Unfortunately I can’t volunteer for the job today because I promised to help Tohsaka with a project.”

“A project involving the Greek gods?” Le Fay asked carefully and the Rook gave her a calm but harsh glare. “Can’t be for Lady Medusa, she have been living here too long for you to need it and-”

“Fay.” Altria stopped her sibling with a tone of warning, placed a hand behind her neck before turning to her hosts and lowering both their heads. “I apologize for her rudeness.”

“It is fine and she is right, this isn’t about Medusa.” Was all Luvia was willing to say but several in the table grew either angry or somber.

Le Fay lowered her head further. “I apologize. I didn’t know it was some sort of sensitive topic.”

Rias waved her off. “It is fine but please, forget this happened.” Then she realized what they asked and turned to her lover. “You are helping them today?”



“They asked me to restore a sword in return for Caliburn Ruler.” Shirou informed and several in the table nodded.

Especially Kiba. “Giving up a weapon like that without a replacement would be stupid. So what sword do you girls want? Something Holy or perhaps Cursed?”

“Or will my Champion make one for you?” Medusa asked carefully as the sisters looked at each other.

Then Altria turned to them with a frown. “Can we do this after breakfast?” Immediately after her question she began to munch her food again, making her cheeks look like a chipmunk’s.

Several in the table found themselves surprised how endearing the image was while still being regal somehow. “I don’t see why not.” Shirou replied as he finished his food. One of the few normal sized portions. “You did keep your word and even helped with Zolgen. The least I can do is take a look at that sword and if I can restore it, I will.” He then turned to Xenovia who knew what was coming. “And since you won’t leave me alone, and others are going to complain, have Koneko take a look at it after breakfast.”

“But Master- Wait, have Koneko-chan look at it?”

“It is just exhaustion, right? EM can’t fix that.” The redhead Mage smiled at Koneko who was nodding confidently. “But Senjutsu can.”

“I will do my best.” The nekomata declared before she returned to eating.

“Oh, I completely forgot about that.” Durandal’s Owner recognized with a small laugh. “For a moment I was worried you were going to send me to school, Master.”

“Your education is important but since I am not going I won’t try to pick a fight I can’t win.” He said with a small smile as Xenovia returned to eat with gusto. “You also should have told me sooner instead of trying to hide it.” Everybody watched how the former Exorcist froze before she began to scratch her neck with an apologetic smile.

Akeno gently poked her side with a grin. “Just don’t do it again, Xenovia-chan. We would hate to suddenly receive news you got hurt because you didn’t tell us about an injury.”

“Oh, that reminds me.” Kiba exclaimed as he finished his food. “Buchou, Diodora Astaroth had flowers delivered to Asia.”

“Flowers?” Rias sounded intrigued as her Knight nodded.

“Yes, that and a card. We were supposed to tell you yesterday but...”

“But a giant insect tried to make Fuyuki its nest.” The King concluded his thoughts with a pensive expression. “Normally I wouldn’t think much about it, Asia is so cute that having an admirer or two isn’t a surprise, but Diodora is being quite insufferable as of late.”

“How so, Buchou?” Luvia asked calmly but her eyes were sharp as her political mind came into play. “You suspect he is courting her for some nefarious reason?”

“Maybe he just likes her. Asia is easy to love.” Gasper pointed out.

“Maybe out of gratitude...” Rias replenished her own plate one last time before continuing. “Since she saved his life, maybe he really wants to pay back like that but his methods... leave a lot to be desired.”

“What haven’t you been telling me?” Shirou could already guess something was wrong and it was Rias’ turn to laugh apologetically. “Goddamned. What is wrong?”

“Just that Diodora was insistent when asking Asia-chan’s address, Shirou-kun.” Akeno was happy to inform him. “Technically not too bad but one of our men informed Buchou that he tried to bribe them.”

“Gremory men are loyal. The second Diodora tried, they didn’t think twice about calling.” The Heiress declared full of pride. “Of course I won’t give my Pieces address to anyone, noble or not. Especially with something like the Khaos Brigade on the loose.”

Altria and Le Fay traded looks before the younger girl raised her hand. “While I don’t mind a King protecting their subordinates, we are here.”

Rias brushed those concerns away. “We can take care of ourselves and if you haven’t noticed the boundary field in the area is good enough you can’t catch us off guard.”

However Shirou immediately noticed there was more than that. “You just want to keep Asia away from Diodora, right?” His lover couldn’t help but nod, unwilling to lie. “Why? Doesn’t he just want to... what is the expression, court her?”

“Ise said he had a bad feeling.” Everyone in the house, including the guests, knew it was a weak excuse and showed it with their deadpan looks. “Fiiiiiiiine~ I just want to pair Asia with Ise.”

She wanted to give her Pawn a chance and even a blind man could see that Asia also had feelings for him even if they couldn’t notice each other’s attention. As their King, Rias wanted them happy, that was why they lived in the same house, an arrangement the former nun was more than thankful for.

Also there was the fact that the former Holy Maiden was shy and didn’t want to harm anyone’s feelings so she wouldn’t just reject Diodora on his face. Especially when he approached her so romantically and earnestly like he did at the party. Inexperienced as she was, obviously Asia had no idea how to deal with such advances.

“Well, Diodora isn’t quitting that easily if that bouquet was saying something.” Kiba commented while raising his arms and showering the size of the present. “It was this big and with the most beautiful green flowers I have ever seen.”

“Oh my~ Looks like Ise-kun has a rival. Fufufufu.” Akeno giggled behind her hand but Rias wasn’t finding it funny.

Rias didn’t find it funny and decided to reveal some more information. “From what Asia told me he was overwhelming her at the Youth Devil Gathering party.” Not with those exact words but the King of Gremory knew how to read between the lines with her Bishop. Taking a deep breath she continued with, “He is also asking too much and even going around me to try and get to her. While that should be romantic, it is as if he was trying to overwhelm me to get to her.” She scoffed as she placed her elbow on the table and held her cheek. “And he didn’t even drop by Fuyuki to talk personally so until I know his intentions I won’t trust him with Asia.”

While some looked uncertain and most grew quiet, Altraï nodded her head in agreement. “So long as you hear your subordinate and take into account her opinion I can only call your path correct. However,” emerald eyes locked into blue ones with a challenge, “do not allow your instincts to completely swallow your objectivity.”

“Oh my, I can guarantee to you that I am being very objective. Very~”

“You may think you are but a King can’t be locked on just thinking about one person.”

“Fortunately I am not a King of a nation and just need to care about my people.”

“Aren’t going to one day lead your Clan? And doesn’t the Gremory hold more territory than most nations.”

“And I will make sure every single one of my people is happy in them.”

“That is impossible. As a leader sooner or later a decision that will harm someone will be necessary and a sacrifice will have to be made.”

“Only a weak King would think that.”

“Nobody can make everyone happy, that is a fact.”

‘What is up with this sudden tension?’ Medusa, Akeno and others shared a similar thought as Gremory and Pendragon started to debate the merits of a King. Sure they weren’t raising their voices but neither was willing to give up the last word.

Shirou began to grow concerned and clapped his hands. “Alright, alright. Did everyone finish breakfast?” Immediately Altraï, Koneko and Liz moved to protect their dishes. Le Fay also was still eating but she reacted more subdued. “Then finish it already. A lot of us still have school.”

“Just Kiba, Gasper and Luvia.” Akeno supplied as she then pointed to herself. “Since we are working with Buchou, we don’t need to hurry up.”

“Actually we do have a schedule.” Rias groaned as she and Altria looked at each other. There was respect between them but at the same time neither truly acknowledged the other’s ideals. “What about you?”

As her sister was still eating, and to avoid another heated debate, Le Fay decided to answer. “After the Mage of Swords-”

“You can call me Shirou.” He told the girl for the second time, making her pause.

Finally the younger Pendragon nodded in acceptance. “As soon as Shirou-san...” Clearly she wasn’t used to Japanese suffixes and he waved her to drop it. “Fine, as soon as Shirou can confirm if he can repair our sword we will wait for it to be repaired and then depart-”

“I would like to see Caliburn be reforged.” Altria said suddenly, surprising the table. Then she bowed her head in respect and humility. “If possible, please, allow me to witness its rebirth.”

For a moment Shirou stayed quiet as he mused about the request as every impulse in his bones told him to say ‘no’. He knew more about the story of Caliburn than anyone else alive and if his suspicions about Altria were correct, suspicions supported by Avalon of all things, he wanted her nowhere near that sword.

At the same time, ‘If anyone deserves to see Caliburn restored, wouldn’t that be the reincarnation of Artoria herself?’ Shirou mused with a hum before nodding his head. He wasn’t sure if Altria was really Artoria’s new life but Avalon worked with her around and that was good enough. “That is doable...”

“Thank you.” Altria relaxed and got back to eating.

“But!” Only to freeze as Shirou shouted, scaring everyone. “I have a condition.”

“Condition?” The blonde asked cautiously as Le Fay stayed quiet and watched the interaction.

Biting his inner cheek the Mage quickly took a sip of juice. “Yeah, I will let you watch me reforge, hell, it will be in Kuoh so you can see the sword before and after.” He stared at the glass, trying to find the right words to not upset Altria. “But only if you promise to not try and pull it out.”

Altria gave the most subtle reaction of them all by just raising an eyebrow while everyone else showed a tell or another of confusion, panic and even dread. Especially those who knew about the Sword of Selection’s true potential and function. Xenovia and Kiba more than anyone else as they found themselves staring at the middle sibling of Pendragon.

‘She can draw the sword?’ They both deducted and soon others did as well since everyone who lived in that home knew Shirou wouldn’t wish for anyone to draw that blade if he could help it.

"I already said that if necessary then I will draw Caliburn." Altria replied fearlessly but the Mage wasn't having any of it.

"Either you promise to not try and pull Caliburn or you aren't watching me reforge it." He saw her clench her fist in frustration but refused to let his eyes stray from hers. "You won't need that sword once I fix yours anyway."

"You don't even know if you can do it..." She rebutted calmly but cautiously. "Why shouldn't I draw Caliburn? Are you afraid that I will misuse-"

"If you really can pull it, you won't be staying in the Khaos Brigade. Odds are that you will even start fighting them." Shirou suspected that Altria wanted to do so already but refused to due to her family and friends. But once the Selection was made there would be no escaping, she would have to fight. 'Most likely the Order of Pendragon will get involved in this case . Even if I don't tell them it is all a matter of time. The second Caliburn leaves Fuyuki, everybody will know.' For a moment Emiya regretted promising to reforge the sword or his inability to destroy it. "Even if I can't fix the sword you want I will make you one better so please, I beg you, don't try and pull Caliburn."

All watched with concern as Shirou lowered his head and shoulders to legitimately beg Altria to not pursue that sword. Xenovia understood more than anyone else what he was trying to do. 'He wants to save her but... will she believe Caliburn is dangerous? Will she hear the warnings?'

The former Exorcist did so because she acknowledged Shirou as someone of character who was good and wise. Despite being lost she remembered him also practically begging her to not take the sword, realizing that it wouldn't bring her happiness. At present she was watching someone else in a similar position but Altria's case was different.

The blonde woman wasn't lost nor afraid for her own future, in fact she looked to be chasing it and Caliburn could guide her to accomplish something grand and necessary for the World. As she wasn't lost, her resolve was already stronger than Xenovia's when she debated pulling the Sword of Selection.

Despite such factors, the bluehead decided to say her piece. "Once you draw Caliburn you will have to pay the price."

Hearing his lover's words gave Shirou the chance to find the right argument. "Altria, you need to consider carefully if you really want that sword or not because once you have it all the love you have for your family will be lost." Only he saw her pupils twitch, the smallest of reactions. "You will no longer be human..."

A couple of heartbeats later Altria reacted again by lowering her head pensively. "We have an obligation to use Caliburn. Either me or my brother." She looked up with an ever more fierce determination in her eyes. "There are elements in the Khaos Brigade, some worse than Zolgen... the Sword of Selection may be the key to defeating them."

“But you don’t need it. That sword isn’t even that strong.” Shirou bit his own tongue as she raised an eyebrow. “Right, I misspoke. It definitely isn’t the Strongest Sword thought. Excalibur is. The real deal.”

“It has been lost.” Altria reminded everyone. “Avalon took it as it should after the King’s death.”

Rias and Xenovia looked at the back of their lover’s head as he winced while holding himself back from something he could regret later. Liz was looking at him from the side with her torso leaning forward in case he revealed the dangerous secrets to strangers.

He had the sheath, the Key to Avalon, and the Pendragon sisters weren’t trustworthy enough to know about it. Leysritt was truly poised to attack them mercilessly if Shirou let that spill, for his own sake.

Yet the Mage successfully held it back by changing tactics. “Maybe the sword that I will restore is stronger than Caliburn?”

“Definitely possible.” He found a surprising ally in Le Fay who focused on her sister. Feeling her younger sister’s eyes from the side wasn’t enough to move Altria but her words were. “Please, promise it, Ria. I don’t want to lose my sister to a sword.”

“Fay...” That did it and Altria couldn’t help but take a deep breath. “As members of the Pendragon family we have an obligation.” Everyone could tell that was a last ditch effort to keep things from escalating.

“But it isn’t like you are going to be King of Britain.” Luvia commented with a shrug. “King Arthur had the mission to unite his people and that time is long past. Sure the actual England isn’t Britain but another thing and that nation isn’t as... virtuous as the one from Legend but still, they don’t need the Sword of Selection to choose their leaders.”

Rias folded her hands below her breasts and chuckled. “I am sure plenty would disagree with that but, from another perspective, Shiro’s argument gains more merit with Luvai’s input.” Raising a hand she pointed to Caliburn Ruler, resting beside the table. “That isn’t the strongest sword, not even close, and even if we can’t get Excaliburn, I am sure we can get another great sword. No, that Shiro can elevate that sword you girls want restored through his own methods.”

Xenovia’s fist hit the palm of her hand. “That is right, he could turn it into a Noble Gear to increase its power.”

Le Fay nodded eagerly. “Yes, yes. Durandal’s power and defense was something beyond its normal capability.” Once again she turned to Altria who returned to her pensive stance. “If he can restore and improve-”

“Couldn’t he do the same to Caliburn?” She didn’t want to interrupt her sister but Altria was interested in what they would argue to dismiss that idea.

The redhead magus shook his head with an expression full of resolve just like hers. "Caliburn is a blade that needs to be restored, both due to my promises and what it represents. But I will never turn it into a Noble Gear." He shook his head again before focusing entirely on Altria. "Even if I could, that sort of action would only doom someone to a longer existence where they are more machine than human. I would hate myself for that alone."

Taking a deep breath, Altria understood the situation fully. "You saw the whole of King Arthur's life, didn't you?"

'If I am right, your life.' Gulping, Shirou nodded. "From when Artoria pulled the sword until it broke, yes I saw much of her life." Neither Pendragon reacted to King Arthur's True Name but he wasn't surprised. "That is why... I wouldn't want that Fate for you." 'Not again.'

The smaller magus grabbed her sister's sleeve and Altria fully turned to her. "Ria, please promise you aren't going to draw that sword. You can see in his eyes." Le Fay looked at Shirou. "Whatever life he saw from that sword, I don't want it for you. Arthur wouldn't want it either. Nor would the others."

Resignation had Altria dropping her shoulders in surrender but some, Shirou, Medusa and Le Fay, could tell that a huge weight also had left her. Only her younger sibling knew exactly why but she wouldn't say anything as a happy smile spread on her lips which she was quick to hide from the world.

Only Medusa noticed that expression of pure joy and yet she wouldn't bring attention to it, judging it to be the happiness of a sister saving her sibling from a gruesome, or in that case sad, Fate.

The goddess wished she could relate to that.

Yet Shirou also saw something else nobody noticed, a look of pure and unwavering determination that crossed Altria's face for a second. It reminded him too much of Artoria during her tenure as Caliburn's Owner. Those moments where she went against her honor and upbringing to do what was right for the majority.

A few instants after Altria returned to eating and it didn't take long for every dish to end up empty in her wake. Sure Koneko went on full offensive while everyone else was talking but it didn't take more than a minute for the blonde swordswoman to catch up and eat her fill.

Once again she ate more than the nekomata, a feat that impressed pretty much everyone present. "If it is like that..." Altria began once again after she was done. "Then I will promise to not take Caliburn if the sword you restore is undeniably better."

And Shirou knew her preference. "And what am I working with?"

"Fay?" With a flourish of the younger sister's wand the plates, bowls and cups all began to float into formation until they were organized into a neat pile above everyone's heads.

With some flourish from her wand the small magus made the plates dance as they marched to the kitchen which had people raising eyebrows at the flair but none commented as that was the sort of control they lacked.

If anything the show frustrated Luvia a little. 'Like someone from a fairy tale, she perfectly manipulates small objects like they were her familiars. Control of this level...' Paying attention to the smaller blonde she saw no signs of circles, or magic circuits or anything similar.

The wand wasn't even moving anymore while the dishes left the premises. "If there is some water in the sink I can also make them wash themselves."

"Wouldn't eliminating the crumbs be better?" Asked the Mage of Swords, not caring about how good Le Fay control was which made her pout. "What?" She turned her face, refusing to meet his eyes. "What?"

"I think she wants some praise." Akeno informed while gently clapping her hands. "Controlling the plates like that is very impressive."

Immediately Le Fay turned to the ravenhead with a smile. "I got that from a book. The magic system there was pretty bad but the idea had merit so I devised a spell that would make small motes of mana group up and take care of some daily tasks."

"It didn't help that most of our friends are... lazy to say the least." Altria commented while petting her sister.

"Slobs. Especially Kuroka." Several eyes moved to look at Koneko but the white haired nekomata just looked down and avoided meeting anyone's eyes.

The older Pendragon noticed it quickly and with a look of realization she cleared her throat. "In any case, can you bring it out?"

"Who do you take me for? Arthur?" Le Fay replied in a jokeful tone before waving her wand again and creating a teal magic circle with traces of red in it. From it emerged a lean briefcase big enough for a hockey stick or baseball bat. "You must know much about our family, Emiya Shirou." Her tone became immensely heavy as her eyes seemed to glow ominously. "Thanks to Caliburn and Galahad's shield you must have seen plenty of our History and weapons."

Noting she was waiting for a reply, the Mage of Swords gave one. "I did peek quite a bit but only what they could give me."

"Even with your Reality Marble?"

'What is with that tone?' Rias asked herself the same thing many in the table were curious about.



Many but Altria and Medusa, one because she was already used to her sister's mood changes while the other just watched the event with extreme curiosity but no surprise.

Shirou took a deep breath and let out an even longer sigh. "Why do you people think Reality Marbles are all knowing? Sure it can give me information about the weapons that other weapons faced," he shrugged, "but obviously it has bits and pieces lacking. Even when we are talking about the Round Table, Galahad's shield, it only had the surface of the swords imprinted on it and not all their History or abilities."

"Of course they aren't but that wasn't what I was referring to." Far from Altria's sight, Le Fay smiled and turned a little cruel. "Tell me, what do you know about Camlann?"

Several people looked at each other before Shirou finally replied. "I am sure pretty much everyone here knows about King Arthur- no, Artoria's final fight against Mordred." He paid attention to Altria more than anyone but she remained silent, looking back at him calmly. "Any particular reason?"

"It will be easier to just show him." The older sibling interrupted with a small smile. "Sorry about that. Fay is just being dramatic."

The younger sibling pouted. "Just want to make sure this man can appreciate our family's History since he is about to touch a huge part of it." Her eyes focused on the Mage again. "When you think of the Battle of Camlann, what comes to your mind first? King Arthur's death or the weapons in it?"

She opened the briefcase before anyone could respond and what they all saw was a red mantle covering the true contents inside. When the case was opened they all felt a disturbance, power in its more pure sense but one which felt broken. After paying attention they realized why.

It was a sword shattered in many pieces spread around the velvet mantle which partially covered it. The handle was the most intact part of the weapon, a beautiful thing that still shone with a luster despite time trying to wear it out. That sort of luster was what sent the power out into small waves, almost like a sonar.

"Noble Phantasm?" Rias asked but Shirou shook his head.

"Close but... not quite." He said while leaning to grab the handle. He stopped short before looking up towards Le Fay who watched him like a hawk before nodding slightly.

Permission given, Shirou prepared himself as his World received its new inhabitant.

*Three skilled smiths worked in unison as they were given the most sacred of tasks by their liege. At least sacred for their kind and profession.*

*Working diligently, they took shifts, reapplied magic and runes to their tools while keeping the fire going with a piece of coal the King had presented them for that task and held a forever hot flame which they channeled in the blade's making.*

*Much like the fuel, several specific materials were also given by crow to be used for that weapon and it alone. The finest steel, the finest copper, the finest bronze and any other metal that could be used to make something perfect or as close to perfection as Humanity could manage.*

*They settled for silver as gold was too brittle and bronze too weak for the spells being waved into that blade. They were picked for their skills in magic as much as metallurgy so they knew silver was the only metal that could survive their combined skills and might.*

*When it was done the three looked at each other with sadness and joy; sadness for they would never be able to make anything like it again but joy because they knew they made something unique and without equal.*

*Once clean the blade shone like the most pure silver to ever exist, angels would later sing that the weapon was more radiant than the pearly gates of Heaven itself. From top to bottom it was all silver; a tall, two handed, double edged sword, with a big guard that extended some of the blade and a pommel shaped more like a jewel.*

*Satisfied with their work the smiths had a messenger inform the king and while they made plans to travel to the castle and properly deliver their masterpiece she entered the building given for their task without ceremony.*

*All three kneeled as the most seasoned smith presented the weapon they toiled seven days and seven nights for.*

*It wasn't as strong as the blade already in the king's waist, they knew from the beginning nothing they could make would ever compare with that weapon even if they had a thousand years to work on it.*

*Despite that they knew there was no weapon in all Camelot that could compare to their creation and that if King Arthur was going to use their creation in combat it would never fail for their sword to make something as close to Excalibur as possible.*

*Artoria took the weapon, weighted it and took a few swings to make sure it was all how she requested. The guard had been perfect, the handle was proper and the blade had not a single flaw if not a little bigger for more durability as she requested.*

*For all intents and purposes it was what she had ordered but not what she wanted.*

*For the blade had weight, there was no impression of a higher power joining with her soul and there was no Divinity to be found. Which was fine, the smiths had made great work and she rewarded them handsomely, holding their weapon while giving them the praise that was due.*

*She wasn't going to tell them it was a sword which would never see combat or that their work wasn't for war or her protection or whatever excuse one of her knights offered when suggesting having the weapon made.*

*The sword could tell it too as her grip was too honest and made her intent clear; it wasn't a weapon of war but an apology.*

*"What shall be its name, my King?" One of the smiths asked and received a pensive glance before Artoria's eyes moved back to the weapon.*

*"Clarent. Its name shall be Clarent after my father's sword." They praised the name and cheered, not realizing what the name truly meant.*

*The original Clarent had been lost because king Vortigern used it in combat when it was never for such, the fragments of the original blade even being donated and used for the weapon Artoria held in that moment.*

*During Uther's reign the sword was just for knightings and special ceremonies. So would the new one for Artoria needed it more as a symbol of kingship than a tool of war.*

*Her previous symbol, Caliburn, was broken and Merlin already confirmed it wasn't going to be restored. Much of her rule was thanks to that blade, several of the nobles and former kings only followed her because of Caliburn.*

*Excalibur was far superior in power and undoubtedly a more majestic sword in every level but it wasn't the Sword in the Stone, it wasn't the weapon people were told about for years to be what would select the True King even if it deserved far greater titles.*

*She told as much to her knights at their next meeting, the blade not leaving her hand until its conclusion where several other tasks and details about the kingdom were decided. It was almost an afterthought in the King's hand but nobody called her on it, each Knight from the Round Table drawing their own thoughts about the weapon.*

*Some thought that it was a symbol of the King's Humanity, that Artoria had reforged the weapon in her father's memory.*

*She hardly knew the man.*

*Others thought it was for politics and took her words at face value. Excalibur and Avalon could keep most rebels in check with their powers alone.*

*None really understood the King or dared to ask.*

*If they did, perhaps Artoria would explain what the sword felt, how sad the King felt as it remained in her hand for a whole day until everything else was done. The blade was forged as an apology, as a replacement for Caliburn as despite having abandoned much of her Humanity, a part of the King felt less worthy without Caliburn.*

*And deeply regretted how it broke, in a duel that didn't need to happen where her pride took over as she saw herself being beaten by a man who she easily welcomed in her Round Table just after.*

*Reaching her personal armory the King gazed to the silver sword one more time and allowed her emotions to flow in the blade. For an instant her cold and distant expression vanished, a gentle girl remaining behind and the sort of person who wore her true self openly.*

*Guilt was a powerful thing, so powerful that even Artoria could feel it. It and many other emotions grew stronger once Caliburn broke. Those emotions all were engraved on the weapon throughout the day due to its forging method. That and her emotions were just stronger than most because of how much she repressed them.*

*Gently she placed Clarent into the armory and there it rested most of the time, leaving only when a knight or another came to retrieve it for the King. Those occasions were rare as Artoria didn't care about parties or ceremonies unless the person truly earned it.*

*Since those knights were members of the Round Table in a way or another it was safe to say those weren't few. The Gallant Lancelot, the Calm Tristan, Confident Gawain and many other knights worthy of every praise were awarded with Clarent's touch on their shoulders. Many heroes were knighted by it too.*

*Years went by and that was Clarent's only duty, the sword's power never used in battle. Why would Artoria do it anyway? She had Excalibur, an infinitely better weapon and no matter how much good of a work the smiths did, Clarent could only fall short.*

*But more than anything, every time Artoria held the blade there was a sadness in her grip. Clarent, despite not having a mind of its own, knew it was the wrong sword and that another belonged on that King's grip. Excalibur belonged but in a different way, Caliburn was the sword she longed for.*

*No matter how much she managed to hide behind her King visage, Clarent could tell, could feel, and take in every emotion it was presented with. However there was little it could do about the subject as it lacked any urgency or capability to change its situation.*

*That and also who else but Artoria could hold such a weapon. It was made for the King and nobody else could be called such those days besides King Arthur. With how powerful it was Clarent would easily break weaker warriors.*

*However one exception presented themselves in a time of calamity as the castle was quickly taken by someone while King Arthur was away.*

*A rebellion but not a bloody one, a fast coup that went basically uncontested saw the royal armory open for the rebels as some of the Round Tables weapons resided there.*

*Mostly for the fallen ones as plenty of brave knights perished in service, especially in the years leading to the rebellion.*

*That was when Clarent felt it; a presence equal to King Arthur's but also not.*

*A mighty warrior strode inside the armory and beat every single one of the invaders with its armored hands. They complained, claiming that the figure was their leader and he agreed to that but beat them up anyway for a simple reason.*

*“Just because they are dead, doesn’t mean you get to piss in their graves!!”*

*Dressed in heavy armor the warrior cut a mighty figure indeed, despite their relatively low stature. The armor itself was well crafted for combat while having enough in its design to belong to a noble. It covered most of their body and had red highlights that were complemented by the sash in their waist and the sleeves over their arms.*

*The most memorable part of their armor was without a doubt the helmet which had huge horns like a bull’s and completely covered their head while a skull-like faceplate glared at their subordinates with clear murderous intent.*

*Nobody dared to challenge the most violent Knight of the Round Table, or former knight as without a doubt starting a rebellion would have them kicked out but that didn’t matter to Clarent.*

*What mattered for the sword was that the knight saw it and made a beeline straight towards where it rested. There was no hesitation and the knight grasped the weapon, feeling its power try to crush their spirit. But they didn’t claim to be Arthur’s equal for nothing and with a mighty roar they claimed the weapon, raising it to the sky.*

*A red light exploded from the blade as Clarent changed because of how it was claimed. New emotions invaded the weapon and changed its structure as, unlike King Arthur, that knight had no problem letting all their feelings run wild.*

*Rage, frustration, indignation and a touch of love that the knight themselves didn’t understand.*

*“My name is Mordred Pendragon!! Son of Arthur Pendragon and the True King!!” Even the rebels were surprised by the reveal but that didn’t matter to Clarent as the light changed to lightning which roared around the castle.*

*When the power died down and all could see the knight they noticed how lightning covered his form as sparks jumped all around him and struck several parts of the armory. Clarent itself hadn’t submitted to Mordred as much as he had brute forced his ownership over the blade.*

*Changes still came as the pommel, the handle and the guard had gained several red highlights with the blade gaining some engravings like a sword pointing upside down.*

*But the biggest change was that it became a Cursed Sword for the weapon was only supposed to be passed to the true heir and Mordred wasn’t acknowledged by the King. Yet he could survive Clarent’s power and could undoubtedly use much of it even as its form would punish him for every attempt.*

*Which was just fine with Mordred as he finally had a weapon that could challenge his hated(beloved) father. Finally he had something equal to Excalibur even if it really wasn't so and the blade which once was a dazzling silver had grown dull because of the Curse.*

*A curse born of robbery, of hidden feelings and treachery.*

*That would forever become Mordred's Title; the Knight of Treachery, of Betrayal, and Camelot would fall by his hand, Britain pushed back hundreds of years where a new Era of violence would begin until another king unified the people.*

*However that king would never be the True King, they would never be King Arthur and their knights would never compare to the Round Table. None would be as noble and as strong as them even if many in the future would inherit their ideals. But with their ideals also came the flaws.*

*For Clarent was the contender who would end Camelot's Age once for all as one of the strongest swords ever forged despite being reduced in Mordred's hands, exactly what the Knight of Treachery needed to even the playing field between him and his father.*

*And so it was for even if they had to give up the castle, escaping Camelot wasn't a hard task with Clarent taking point. The blade's edge was so sharp Mordred could cut the armors of knights together with their shields and swords. Only a few could really compete with the Knight of Treachery but none was present to even try.*

*For weeks the rebellion burned bright as it went all over Britain, King Arthur always arriving just in time to put out the fires as Mordred prepared for the decisive battle. What the Knight of Treachery wanted was an open space and with the lands of Britain there were plenty to choose.*

*Only Clarent knew Mordred's real intent as what he wanted wasn't victory but King Arthur's acknowledgement so even when the terrain was perfect or their troops were in a better position they were held back because it wasn't the right time.*

*The right time would only come when King Arthur had Camelot's remaining armies and was personally on the battlefield. Any other victory was worthless in Mordred's eyes.*

*Camlann was the final battlefield where all went down, both sides called all knights, infantry archers and all manners of magical beasts they had. Even dragons flew in the sky that day with some angels descending to support King Arthur while the Knight of Treachery found allies in beasts like wolfmen.*

*Sure there were plenty of maneuvers outside of that battle but all it ensured was that there would be no reinforcements or supplies. It put both sides in check to the point it became do or die before it even began and first blood had been spilled.*

*And Clarent was there for all of it, from the very beginning when Mordred drew it until the*

*final charge, sitting atop of a huge red warhorse, shouting out a simple but powerful speech to motivate their troops.*

*They all saw King Arthur as a tyrant for a reason or another and Mordred hated every single one of them.*

*He hated his father more or at least he thought he did.*

*Either way the rebels charged first and the blood bath began.*

*Clarent's History showed how many lives it took that day as thunder, light, fire and death flew around the battlefield. Then there was the melee as the knights crashed first with the infantry following soon after. It was a mess of corpses that belonged in a painting of horror and told everyone how bloodthirsty the battlefield could be.*

*Mordred was in the thick of it and going straight for King Arthur even as several men threw themselves to stop the Knight of Treachery's onslaught. None could stand against Clarent and even if some managed to get a few shots in. It wasn't enough as power busted forward and Mordred's strikes grew feral.*

*Eventually Clarent's owner could see nothing but corpses, standing on a pile made of knights and beasts alike. That and King Arthur standing close by.*

*Artoria's royal blue clashed hard with the field of the dead but she still looked as regal as ever.*

*As perfect as ever.*

*Mordred hated that and with a roar their swords clashed.*

*Clarent suddenly found itself lacking for the first time since it drew blood and if it had a conscience it would have pondered about the truths of how strong Excalibur really was. Still it siphoned in the feelings of both fighters as its History took in all of it.*

*There was rage, sadness and resignation on every blow from the King of Camelot who fought with bravery and skill unparalleled. A symbol of knighthood until the very end.*

*There was rage, sadness and joy on every blow from the Knight of Treachery who moved like a brawler and a beast. No chivalry was left but there was bliss.*

*Artoria wasn't fully immersed in the fight but Mordred was and after hours clashing the Knight of Treachery finally managed to dislodge the golden sword for an instant and strike a blow in her 'sire's' flesh.*

*It would be fatal but not immediately, the King could still be saved if medical attention was quickly provided. Both knew it wasn't coming and that only one of them would leave Camlann alive.*

*So Mordred charged as joy left his breast and a heavy heart took over Clarent as killing Artoria was never the intent. Yet it needed to be done for the Knight of Treachery judged that he would be a better King.*

*In an unexpected maneuver King Arthur discarded Excalibur fully and caught Mordred completely off guard.*

Shirou could practically read the disbelief behind the masked face in his mind. *'Is the King surrendering?'* Not only from the action itself but even the plausibility of such.

*King Arthur surrendering couldn't be processed in Mordred's mind and for an instant, a short painful instant equivalent to the beat of a fly's wings, the Knight of Treachery found himself frozen with his sword above his head while the King drew his final weapon; a lance.*

*Clarent couldn't process what it was and the last thing it felt was its grip growing slack as Mordred's body was pierced without mercy. Yet the Knight of Treachery refused to fall and moved to complete the attack which would finish the King only for Excalibur to return and break Clarent into pieces.*

*Still with the hilt in her hand Mordred's face was there for all to see, including Artoria who saw a more salvage version of herself with fangs and a youthful look. But also eyes full of panic, fear, sadness and despair as her 'son' fell on her knees while the lance left her body.*

*Mordred's final moments were spent in a pit of darkness as the 'father' she chased her whole life turned around even as she tried to raise her arms, almost for a hug.*

*Unfortunately Clarent remained close to the ground as even in death, Mordred refused to let go of the sword.*

"Shiro?" Rias grew concerned when it took more than a second for her lover to process the sword's existence but chose to say nothing. She only called him when something odd happened, something incredibly rare.

A tear had dropped from Shirou's right eye much to everyone's surprise including the Mage himself whose free hand came to dry it up. He still had his hand in front of his eyes for a moment as he tried to understand everything he saw.

"Do you need a moment?" His lover's voice helped him center himself and Shirou slowly shook his head.

"No, I think I am done." He deposited the handle back in the briefcase with a pensive look.

Despite his reply no one said anything until Altria spoke softly, "If you need-"

"Clarent, Mordred's sword." He interrupted her respectfully before raising his head to meet her eyes once more. "You want me to repair Mordred's sword."



Most of Clarent's History after Mordred had been the sword moving around in several containers as nobody dared to reforge it. Actually it was very similar to its existence before the Knight of Treachery had claimed it, dusting around without a real purpose.

"Is it possible?" Kiba asked out of pure curiosity. "While I still feel some power from it, I confess it isn't enough to amount to anything, really."

Uncovering the sword completely Shirou revealed the four fragments Clarent had been reduced to in its last fight. "Everything I need to restore Mordred's sword is here but... Do you want Mordred's sword or your sword?" He asked Altria who raised a brow.

"Is there a difference?"

"As it is now, Clarent is a Cursed Sword. I don't need to explain anything else, do I?" Shirou watched as some in the table winced.

Some but not Gasper. "What's the problem? All of Kiba-senpai's swords are Cursed."

Luvia began to pat the Bishop's head. "Yes but all of them are a byproduct of his sacred gear and so their curse sort of translated as 'they will break when away from their owner' sort."

"And obviously Clarent's curse is worse." The Knight himself commented, the Mage nodding his head in confirmation.

"It isn't relevant." Altria shot back, Le Fay shaking her head.

"It is plenty relevant since it is a Curse of Pain." The smaller magus focused on her redhead counterpart and asked, "Can you remove it?"

"Not here but... yes, I am sure I can." Since he saw all its creation process and had plenty of experience, Shirou was confident in his odds.

"And make it so in a Noble Phantasm? A real one?"

"It is practically already there." The Mage of Swords waved at the weapon and they all could feel its broken power. "Restoring it will ascend it to Noble Phantasm status without a shadow of doubt. As far as Legends go it is old enough, powerful enough, to take care of the rest once the sword is restored." He picked up some fragments and felt the curse in the metal. "But first we need to get rid of the curse or else it will be a cursed sword forever."

"Why? Can't you fix it first, Master?" Xenovia asked with a frown. "Then you can get rid of the curse by making it into a Noble Gear."

"He would fail because a Crystalized Legend can't be changed so easily." Le Fay was the one who responded. "That is the problem, he needs to restore the blade to the condition before Mordred took it and get rid of the curse or else when it becomes a Noble Phantasm it will forever be part of its existence."

“Yeah and I can’t do it in my workshop either. Actually, the whole process needs the blessings capable of counteracting curses.” He turned to Medusa who quickly shook her head.

“You know very well that while I can use curses I am vulnerable to them.”

“Would rituals at a temple work?” Akeno offered half as a question and half as a suggestion.

“Depends but I don’t think there are many temples in Fuyuki who would accept purifying a sword while letting me work on it in its facilities.” Came Shirou’s sad reply. Inspecting the fragment a little more he nodded with regret. “I will need the area where it is purified to work fast or else the curse will return as it is deeply connected to Clarent.”

“But once it is a Crystalized Legend we won’t have to worry about that.” Rias held her chin in thought, thinking about Kyoto and how they could drop by to get the job done. ‘Problem is to get permission to forge a sword there. Questions will be asked and we are technically committing a crime helping members of the Khaos Brigade.’

With a snap of her fingers, Xenovia offered her own solution. “What about the church?”

““The church?”” Several people asked at the same time.

“Look, hear me out. I know that God is...” She turned to the Pendragon siblings and Altria smiled sympathetically while Le Fay rolled her eyes.

“Dead, yes, we know.”

“Right. Apparently everyone on the Khaos Brigade knows that.” Xenovia continued after recovering, God’s death still a sort of sore topic. “Anyway, what better place to purify someone than in the house of the God known for making Holy Swords?”

Not necessarily disagreeing, Shirou still saw a problem. “We would need to go out of town anyway since Fuyuki’s church is falling apart.”

“Not anymore. Heaven is using it as an embassy of sorts.” Rias informed, much to her lover’s surprise. “Shidou Irina moved there recently with... I want to say two members of the clergy, a priest and a nun, but the latter decided to work at Kuoh.”

“I wouldn’t call her a nun, more of a priestess, pretty much an Exorcist. Many of the faithful wouldn’t want her as a nun.” Durandal’s Owner commented offhandedly.

Akeno playfully slapped Xenovia’s exhausted shoulder. “Don’t say that about Caren-chan. She is so nice.”

“Nice but dangerous.”

“Oh, now you are being kind.”

“Pretty sure she traumatized a few students at Kuoh already.”

“They shouldn’t hurt themselves just to meet the new nurse. If anything, that was a good lesson. Fufufufu.”

“Moving on.” Shaking the conversation off before Akeno definitively got the better of her, the former Exorcist grabbed a fragment of the blade. “I am sure they wouldn’t mind if we used the church to purify a sword.”

“For members of the Khaos Brigade?” Luvia pointed out skeptically.

“Just don’t say anything.” Rias offered with a shrug. “You are the Magician of Gremory and this is still our territory. House of God or not, we are allies and if you just say you want to purify a sword I doubt any priest is really going to disagree.”

Altria shook her head in firm disagreement. “That sort of underhanded method doesn’t sit well with me.”

“Do you want a sword or not?” The Heiress asked with a raised brow and Altria raised Ruler for her to see. “Sorry, I mean, do you want a sword that is more than the piece of another sword and basically falling apart or a Noble Phantasm that can possibly take down a mountain if you try hard enough.” That made the blonde wince and lower her sword before she glanced to the side and mumbled something. “What was that?”

“... I want a Noble Phantasm.”

“Thought so.”

“Whoa, losing a lot today, Ria.” Le Fay commented with amusement which earned an irritated glance and nothing else.

Taking a deep breath, Shirou revised the plan. “So we go to the church, reforge Clarent and later today we go restore Caliburn.” Already he knew that the first task would take a while but the second would be fast since he spent far longer studying the Sword of Selection. “If we go fast enough, everything will be done by dinner.” Practically the whole table perked up at that.

“Then we better get going.” Rias jumped to her feet and pointed to Akeno. “Change out of your uniform,” moved to Medusa, “get ready to roll,” then the blonde trio at the desk’s corner, “prepare to go to classes after Koneko checks Xenovia.”

Both who quickly stood, the bluehead saluting. “You can count on me to keep an eye on Shiro.”

“Of course I can. Now, I need to call Sona and get everything ready.”

“Ready for what, exactly?” Medusa dared to ask only for Rias to wave her finger with a huge grin.

“A surprise~”

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Tapping a finger on her arm, Sona gritted her teeth with rage. ‘Curse you, Zolgen Makiri.’ Unlike any other day where she would be wearing her school’s uniform she was dressed in a long but light blue dress. She had her legs crossed as the limousine traveled and looked far too stressed for someone technically skipping classes. ‘Damn you to the pits of Hades you bastard-’

“Kaichou? Are you alright?” Sitting by her side Tsubaki was dressed in a conservative buttoned up pink top with short sleeves and a long white skirt. Her hair was unusually folded in a neat bun, exposing her neck. “If you want I can deal with this and tell Buchou that you have other things to worry about.”

“I do have other things to worry about but the possibility of a parasite infiltrating my town is at the top of the list.” Their driver winced since he was part of the Watchers and should have prevented someone like Zolgen even getting close to Fuyuki in the first place. “I just hope this insane plan of hers works. Did Setsuna agree to meet with us?”

Opening up her cell phone the Queen checked her messages. “Yes and from her reply, Jakken-sensei is already moving to make sure everything is done by the book.” If anything that cheered her King up as she loved when her co-workers were competent. “She is already there and she is asking about the crew working on the terrain.”

“Gremory?” Sona asked the driver as the man could tell by her eyes focused on him via the rearview mirror.

“Yes, lady Sona. Lady Rias swiftly ordered us to start dealing with the property once she was sure the criminal was dealt with. The Gremory Group prepared a crew overnight, filling the proper papers and ordering the immediate reforms on the former Matou property. If anyone tries to investigate it will look like we were working on it for weeks.”

Which covered the manor’s destruction, something that Rias didn’t need to explain but sounded all too proud when she told Sona that. In either case getting a crew full of people aware of the moonlit world was the toughest task but considering everything the Heiress of Sitri knew there were enough arguments to get it done.

‘They just need to start the work anyway and after that we can get a normal crew in the next shift.’ Their goal would be to make it look like it was a programmed demolition and not the result of a fight to the death. Sona knew the Gremory Group was capable of such and focused on other matters. “And about the... ‘dark sensation’ people were feeling in the area? Was it solved?”

Tsubaki checked her phone again before shaking her head. “Setsuna-sama just confirmed what we already knew; it is still there and nothing can be done.” She saw her King expression grow cold as she held back her anger.

“Looks like we are going with Rias’ gamble then.”

“Kaichou, it can work.”

“Oh, and it will. So long as Medusa doesn’t mind having it sprung on her and go along with the ‘plan’.” Pointed out the Heiress as the car approached the Matou’s former property, the gate now sporting several people dressed as part of a construction crew.

One opened the door and allowed the limousine to pass without stopping before closing the gate and working on the fence, breaking it apart with proper equipment while also keeping watch as the place would need to be guarded for a while.

Several VIPs were meeting there, after all, and while the Watchers failed on locating Zolgen they wouldn’t allow anyone to approach the Heiresses or the Princess from Kyoto. All those on the front were professionals with strict orders to work at a slower pace and coordinate with the teams in the forest.

Regardless of that the limousine arrived at the sight of the manor quickly or what was left of it. From a picture on her Queen’s phone Sona could see the hole being filled by the crew was truly once a huge residence for several people. Of it only a few stones remained and those were already being Destroyed by a minor member of the Bael Clan.

‘Is that one of Zekram’s?’ The Ancient Devil had so many children Sona had trouble remembering most of them. Especially with how many died over the years.

“Sona, Tsubaki.” Setsuna was dressed in jeans, a blue top short enough to reveal her navel if not by a black undershirt with her naginata on her shoulder. Besides her there were two men, disguised yokais, acting as bodyguards. “I confess it is a bit of a treat seeing you two outside school.”

“Where we should be if Makiri hadn’t decided to visit his old stomping grounds. Centuries old.”

Hearing the Heiress’ frustration, the hanyou turned to the Queen who bowed. “Greetings, Setsuna-sama. I apologize for Kaichou’s irritation but as you can see this is a frustrating situation.”

“Took the words from my mouth.” Setsuna looked at the car before frowning and turning to the two. “Rias isn’t with you?”

Controlling herself, Sona asked with a thin veil of calm. “She isn’t here yet? Strange considering she lives closer.”

When the Inutai was about to answer her nose detected something and she looked to the side. “Apparently she just arrived.”

Indeed, flying through the woods came Rias and Akeno with Medusa in the arms of the latter. Both were dressed with practical clothes, the King of Gremory looking ready for a hike with cargo shorts and heavy shirt while her Queen wore suitable pants but a light black shirt. The goddess was in her usual white and black dress, looking all too pleased at being carried in someone's arms.

"Sorry for the delay." Rias started immediately upon landing. "We had to set up some plans and deal with some stuff before we left and-"

"And breakfast was fantastic." Akeno couldn't help herself, especially when she saw the jealous faces on the three black haired girls. "Indeed it was divine."

"Happy for you that your Magician is multi-use." Sona's dry tone could put a desert to shame. It changed smoothly to a formal one as she focused on the goddess present. "Lady Medusa, good morning."

"Morning to you as well, lady Sitri. I feel we don't meet up enough, which is a pity." Because the purple haired girl respected the Heiress a lot.

"I agree completely but obligations and duties keep all of us busy." Turning around she motioned to the working crew as while the hole where the manor belonged and workshop were filled, others focused on placing stones for the basis and foundation of the building which would take their place. "As you can see, problems are never far when one is working on Fuyuki. Which is why we have plenty of hands to help us."

Rias chuckled at her oldest friend's comment and gave her a side hug. "Like you wouldn't be bored out of your mind if Fuyuki wasn't half this interesting."

"I would be less stressed, yes."

Setsuna shook her head. "Leaders will always find problems so long as they care. If you aren't stressed then you aren't a good leader." Even her father, who was judged to be a cold man, would agree with that sentiment. He cared, even if only his family knew it.

"Nevertheless, should we move to the main trailer? There we can go over the project and talk outside of the sun."

Knowing it was a courtesy for the devils as they struggled under the Great Star, Sona nodded with a smile. "I see no problem with it."

"But before that," Rias turned to a curious Medusa, "I have a request, Lady Medusa. Can I do it directly by you or should I go through your High Priestess for it?"

The goddess let out a sigh especially because of the redhead's smile. "Today you are on fire."

"Trying to relax after the insect nest I had to deal with yesterday." Confessed the Gremory King and nobody envied her position. "So..."

“Yes, yes, Rias. You know you can ask me and if I can do anything I shall.” Medusa replied with a deadpan stare and raising her arms in fake magnificence. “It is the least I can do for one of my Champion’s loves. Ask away.”

“Great. I need your children to spread around and clean this place from Makiri’s leftovers.” A purple eyebrow was raised as Sona massaged her temples at how the Heiress had said it while Akeno giggled.

“Very well. Plenty of snakes are hunters of insects. It would be easier to call the ones back at our place but-”

“I was thinking about spreading them around more permanent bases.” Rias lost her amusement and put her mask as a Heiress on. “And I mean both here and all over Fuyuki.” That sentence actually surprised Medusa and she quickly noticed the other girls weren’t as caught off guard. “Yes, we are willing to make all of Fuyuki your playground from now on. Your territory as much as ours.”

“I will need more than a request to do such a feat. Weakened or not.” Coordinating so many of her children and keeping them hidden from society would take a toll.

“I already explained that you will need a power base and a center for your worship.” Setsuna informed with a bow of her head which was strange for Medusa.

Yet what they were proposing was interesting to any god. “You are going to make me a temple?” Her eyes began to shine at the proposition.

Cute as she was, Rias controlled herself. Business first. “Indeed. Fuyuki is about to have a new and official goddess and temple, per Japanese customs. Now, I know you have many doubts,” she raised her hand to stop the expected interrogation, “but we need to make sure neither Zolgen nor anyone of his ilk can infiltrate our city again. Please, goddess Medusa, protect your town and future followers with your power.”

Frowning for a moment, the girl couldn’t help but comment, “You really know how to sweeten a deal.” Because that was what it was, a deal, an agreement. By protecting Fuyuki she would be given a temple, power over the town and acknowledgement as a true Japanese deity. “Step back, all of you.” Even if she didn’t know how the last part was going to work she trusted her friends and so took up the task.

Royal purple aura extended from the tip of her fingers to her hairs which freed themselves from her braids and began to dance before falling down to touch the ground. Once her hair was freed it was like a river of shining purple was running from her head and spread around the goddess.

Many legends spoke of Divinities creating natural landscapes by just acting but that wasn’t one of those occasions as the ‘river’ was still her hair. And it soon began to move by itself, waving around before the first snake popped up and made its way to the forest. The first of many as soon as an army slithered away as the royal aura diminished yet they still kept going.

Shining scales, large bodies or small ones, some with huge fangs while others lacked that sort of weapon yet everyone stopped to watch as they felt those snakes were all Divine Beasts.

Instruments of Medusa's power that gained life, sentience and knowledge from their mother with the directive of watching over her domain.

All present felt a spark of fear as the number didn't diminish nor did Medusa's hair. At that point they couldn't even speculate if it was strands of it which gave birth to so many serpents or something else. Perhaps the hair was a conductor for her power or perhaps that was just her Divinity and Authority at play.

What both Rias and Akeno noticed immediately was that Medusa had grown stronger since their spar not only because they felt a greater weight in her power but also because it felt more stable.

As a goddess she became greater by the number of followers she gained and some devils truly began to worship her. Even Akeno's presence influenced the Snake Goddess somewhat as Divine acts made for or in front of priests just became more smooth and easy to complete.

In a few minutes hundreds of snakes had left Medusa's hair and they were still going, every worker in the forest stopping to watch their 'march'. Easily they crossed the gates and walls around the property before turning invisible or at least camouflaging themselves. Not all of them would enter buildings but as the goddess of the city she would order some to places of power.

Then the event was done and Medusa retracted her aura, holding back her Divinity fully as the last of her snakes took over the forest. Those with more attuned senses could feel the several amethyst eyes watching them as some began to hunt whatever sort of critters they could find.

Especially insects. "I can assure you nobody like Zolgen will ever step foot in Fuyuki unannounced. Not under my watch." Medusa announced clearly with a small smile. "That said, this will possibly be the most insect free city on the planet in a few moments and we will have to work on feeding my children."

Setsuna looked nervous at what that implied. "Can you just feed them your power?"

"If I am to have a temple, I shall also have followers and they will welcome some of them in their homes, feed them in worship and in return strengthen Fuyuki's protection." Medusa held one of her locks with a soft touch, turning to her priestess. "Akeno, would you mind?"

Understanding her goddess' desire, Akeno moved forward with a gentle and devoted smile. Carefully she collected the hair on the ground and began to tie it up in a braid to keep it away from the floor. There was no need to clean it either as the Divine hair didn't have a single speck of dirt.



For the new arrangement Medusa indicated she wanted something a bit more complex as they were watched by several subordinates of the Gremory Clan. True enough nobody moved during the time it took Akeno to adjust the hair. Part of it was tied around the sides of Medusa's head while the rest turned into a french tail reaching her heels.

Only once that was done the goddess raised an arm and offered a magnanimous smile. "Please, don't mind us. Return to your work."

'And that, ladies and gentlemen, is an example of subtle propaganda.' Rias couldn't help but think with a chuckle as she watched several of the workers suddenly jump back to work with excitement while others were still cautious about the goddess. 'No doubt she got several new followers today and not just devils...'

Demonstrating her power in that form earned the goddess everyone's attention while her natural loveliness would secure their admiration. Even the yokais weren't immune to her charm, not her Divine Authority but pure poise and grace enhanced by her appearance, which had them eating in the palm of her hand.

Sona also noticed how some of the workers stopped to take pictures as they moved to the headquarters of the operation. 'I still don't feel comfortable giving a goddess any influence in our territory.'

Yet it was a compromise she had to take as Rias blatantly said she would pressure her friend if they fought about it. The redhead trusted Medusa but Sona couldn't exactly say the same despite the goddess having saved her life.

Never could, the Heiress of Sitri, forget about that night where they all faced Kokabiel together but she also didn't like the idea of giving up some of her power, her control, to anyone.

Besides, Sona knew how the power dynamics could be skewed towards gods. 'People can kill for money but they will kill for faith.' And with several of the devils' subordinates turning to Medusa with adoration, she knew they wouldn't be the last. However she knew there was no other way but to accept those dynamics. 'Our guards have already failed several times and we need to tighten our security.' She still didn't like it.

Being a rushed job the headquarters for that construction was still a steel trailer with a huge space with two tables for coordination and a meeting room with a big square desk. It was there the devils took their guests, Rias insisting that Medusa sat at one side while everyone else stayed on the other.

However, Akeno had something to say about that. "Sorry, Buchou, but today I am here as my goddess' High Priestess." She informed with her usual smile and her King was fast to accept.

"Fine, fine." With a wave of her finger the Heiress called a magic circle above her head which slowly began to descend over her body.

Sona couldn't stop herself from hiding her face as Setsuna watched in confusion as the magic circle made its way slower from head to toe and then she began to notice how Rias' clothes began to glow with its passage.

Then they disappeared and for a second everyone could see Rias Gremory in her full naked glory before new clothes began to be teleported in from a second pass of the magic circle and it was a complete change of look from her undergarments to her hair style.

From intrepid explorer to office lady, Rias' transformation included an all black business suit, heels and stockings highlighted by a short pencil skirt. A white undershirt controlled her bosom, buttoned up completely but still looking tempting. A corkscrew braid and a pair of glasses finished the look as the woman posed to her audience.

While Setsuna was the only one who didn't understand exactly what was happening, everyone else did, especially Sona. "Exhibitionist. You are a complete exhibitionist."

"Mah, Sona, don't be like that." Rias commented while drawing a metal stick used in presentations. "It is just a way to spare a few minutes and get things going. Certainly you have used it once or twice for a meeting."

"I just have some shame and don't go around naked in front of people!"

"Oh shush, that was just a second. Besides, it is just us, girls here. Nobody minded, right?"

"Come on, Kaichou, don't be like that." Akeno joined the conversation with an amused smile. "It is the spell Lady Leviathan took great effort to love to craft and she uses it all the time." That only made Sona more frustrated and the Hybrid loved the flushed face the usual unflappable School Council President had. 'Could I get away with a picture?'

"Perhaps we should... move along..." Setsuna finally recovered, placed her weapon close to a wall while Tsubaki moved behind her King and massaged her back. Clearing her throat, she turned to Medusa who shared her priestess' amused smile. "I believe we should start talking about how we would introduce Medusa to the Japanese people."

"Do I need to join your Pantheon?" The notion wasn't a pleasant one. "If so I can let my children roam free but I will want no temples in that case. Long ago I decided to not join any kind of Pantheon."

The Daughter of Sesshomaru shook her head. "There is no need. That was what we needed to clarify before and truly not all Japanese Deities are part of the Shinto Faction. Plenty of smaller gods are free to do as they please... Not that you will be small, Medusa."

"It is fine." Knowing how her friend was trying to treat the occasion as a business meeting, the goddess began to hold back her emotions. "It is hardly your fault that your co-workers are lost in their shenanigans and you are left to explain everything by yourself."

“That is Rias’ fault.”

“Don’t be like that, Sona~”

“Nevertheless,” Setsuna raised her voice, silencing them both, “you won’t have to worry about anyone raising a fuss about you ‘having’ Fuyuki. Amaterasu-sama’s message was that, since this is devil territory, they are the ones to choose to whom they will pray towards.” Scratching her cheek, she had detail to add. “Sorry that it took me so long to tell you that.”

Medusa’s brown was raised in curiosity. “Since when did she give you that message?”

“Since you first moved in.” Rias confessed, far more relaxed. “We always expected to build a temple for you sooner or later but, well, you just got serious about being a goddess recently.”

“I... can’t disagree with that.”

“It is also a good opportunity to kill two birds with one stone.” A magic circle appeared and a presentation began on the wall behind the redhead. The first slide read ‘Building a temple and spitting on Zolgen’s grave by Rias Gremory’. “Sorry if these are a bit rough but I only had a few hours to prepare them.”

“How did you have the time?” Sona asked in disbelief as even something basic was too much considering, “We only got approval two hours ago.”

Her fellow Heiress brushed her concern off. “Oh, I was sure we were going to get it. Lots of nobles like Medusa and both our Clans agree this is a convenient way to get rid of the ‘bad feeling’ around the area while fortifying our ally.” A tap from her stick and the next slide appeared, a caricature of a giant bug. “As we all are aware we had an infestation problem recently; Zolgen Makiri showed his ugly head and tried to further his evil agenda.” Another tap and the slide changed to four figures celebrating as an insect skewered by many swords had a skull above his head. “However we successfully dispatched the threat, ruining his machinations once and for all-”

“Rias, stop being dramatic and get to the point.” Sona interrupted which made the redhead Heiress freeze in confusion. “We are already skipping school for this instead of doing it on a weekend-”

“Because leaving matters for later was exactly how Zolgen managed to infiltrate Fuyuki in the first place.” The Heiresses’ eyes met each other as Gremory’s expression turned harsh. “Not only that but this is a problem we should settle as soon as possible before his allies decide to investigate or take vengeance. Honestly, a man like Zolgen isn’t the sort to just die without contingencies and if we aren’t careful we may deal with an apprentice down the line.”

Setsuna nodded in agreement before adding her own thoughts. “Or something worse. Didn’t you say that he made familiars using people? Who knows the sorts of depravity a creature like him delved down in truth.”

“What exactly does that have to do with my temple?” Medusa interjected but her eyes were on Akeno. “Summarize what those two want as quickly as possible, my High Priestess.”

Holding her lips with her finger, the Hybrid cut to the chase. “To have your temple here so your Divine influence can suppress and destroy whatever evil remains in the area.”

Two extra taps had the slides skipping to the draw of a building with a snake on top. “That is right! Since the problem persists because of the evil deeds realized in the place, we must counteract it with positive actions.” The next slide was a picture of people praying to Medusa. “True Faith and devotion are some of the most powerful acts there is which explains why so many churches remain powerful despite some of the clergy’s sins.”

Rubbing her chin, Medusa offered her sincere thoughts. “I don’t know if I like the idea of having a temple in a place where this Zolgen did all manners of experiments. It is repulsive.” Turning to Setsuna she asked next, “Can’t we use one of those around that are already abandoned. Like the one Akeno used to take care of.”

“No, that would offend someone. Either a prospect follower or one of several gods who are against even more showing up in Japan.” The hanyou didn’t need to explain anything else.

Next the purple haired girl turned to Sona. “Let me guess, this is the only space available?”

“Yes. At least the only one we all are willing to pour resources in to have a temple built in record time.”

“And what sort of temple will it be?” Medusa questioned in acceptance and Rias tapped her stick several times to skip the same number of slides. “While this is an area populated for European stylized houses, I doubt that is going to be useful to attract the more traditional members of society. I certainly don’t want to start a Holy War.”

“One made of stone and wood based on Japanese traditions.” The Heiress of Gremory paused at a picture of a traditional Japanese temple. “It will occupy most of this space, not going to mess with the forest unless you want to, with two floors and a huge stone wall.” Another tap and a picture of the Ryuudou Temple showed up. “Much like this one but removing some of the extra buildings and keeping it all contained on a single huge structure.”

“Unless, of course, you want it made differently.” Setsuna interceded. “While I would recommend at least that it remains in our traditions, especially to help attract more faithful, we can make it with several buildings, build a lake in the forest and adjust if necessary.” Playing with her ponytail she added. “We are also going to build the image of your... Japanese self to be more similar to the statues and pictures of already worshiped gods.”

Closing her eyes Medusa quickly debated the pros and cons of all that was being placed in front of her. She was aware that the images people were going to see of her would have to be edited in a sense to not only look more adult but also appear more Japanese. She was being adopted after all, not taking over, so it was inevitable.

After a few minutes she asked. "Would I have to live in the temple?"

"Do you want to?" Setsuna asked back. "You will obviously have your own room once it is completed, regardless of the configuration. Akeno too and... Shirou I suppose, as your Champion."

Humming in interest, Medusa raised a hand. "Separated buildings but I want the main one to be bigger than the rest. Much bigger."

"That can be arranged." Rias replied with a clap.

"The forest will remain untouched but my children need critters to hunt. Get them some."

Sona let out a sigh. "Some extra work but fine."

"Anyone who is considered my worshiper must have special permission to come and go from Fuyuki whenever they pleased."

"You mean by teleport?"

"Yes."

Another sigh later, Sona replied, "Fine, fine. You will have more eyes than us anyway."

"I also want a statue made of pure gold." That froze everyone else and made the goddess smirk. "Not now, though. It will be commissioned when I am complete and have more worshipers. Accept these conditions and I will bless this land and take care of the filth."

"... Medusa-sama..." Tsubaki was the first to recover her voice. "How big should the statue be?"

Crossing her arms she informed proudly. "As tall as the Colossus of Rhodes."

"Can we negotiate that part?" Both Heiresses asked at the same time and Medusa enjoyed seeing how far she could push them.

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Once run down after an incident that ended with the representatives of the Church exiled from Fuyuki, including the Shidou family, the town's church had left to rot. When the fallen angels came they had finished the job by cutting the heads of every statue and undergoing several acts of debauchery.

Fixing it was costly but eventually it was done as the place was refurbished and purified by the hands of True Believers. Tamed had been the overgrown vegetation, repainted was the building itself while every statue was either repaired or replaced.

Atop of the building stood a cross painted in white like the building itself which made it shine when the sun was in the right places. The gate was open but no one was around, there would be no mass that day as there were few Christians left in Fuyuki.

“So two magi are about to enter a church. I wonder if we are going to be smited.” Shirou joked with a chuckle which actually got a laugh from Le Fay.

“Master... that was in poor taste.” Xenovia said with a pout and he offered her an apology while rubbing her shoulder.

Shoulder and not the back because both of them were carrying heavy backpacks full of instruments from his workshop including several swords of which would help him improvise a forge as they knew a building like that lacked one.

Le Fay offered to place them in a magic circle but some of the stuff in the bags was sensitive to mana so Shirou had to refuse. Regardless it was a lot of stuff so Altria, who was holding both Caliburn Ruler and Clarent’s briefcase, thanked for his efforts on the way.

“So, do we just go in or do you need to call the priest?” Altria asked gently as she didn’t know the protocol for those situations.

“Well, if we go by what Rias said we can just go in and get to work but that wouldn’t be polite.” Shirou didn’t like that idea so he came up with a solution. “That is why we are going to go inside and ask to use the place like normal people.”

“Forgetting we aren’t going to do something normal.”

“Working with metal is normal.”

“To forge swords? In this day and age?” The swordswoman challenged the magus who shrugged.

“Everybody has a hobby.”

“And what about the fact that the two of us are members of the Khaos Brigade?” Le Fay asked her fellow magus with honest curiosity.

The redhead shrugged. “If he asks, you two are just clients. No more, no less.”

“Still underhanded but not technically a lie, I suppose.” Altria commented while rubbing her chin before letting out a sigh. “Never thought being a member of Khaos Brigade would give us so much trouble.”

“Thinking that being part of a terrorist organization won’t give you trouble sounds kinda stupid.” Xenovia commented and the blonde couldn’t help but nod with her head down. In her defense she joined because of her brother and his friends. “Anyway, we better go inside. Since Irina and Caren are out we will only have the priest to talk to...”

“What is wrong?” Shirou asked upon noticing her sudden silence.

“Hmph, just noticed that Irina forgot to tell me who they sent here.” She replied before clicking her tongue. “If she hadn’t said for sure it was a priest I would fear that Griselda was around.” The bluehead shivered, not even close to ready to face the woman who raised her.

The double wooden doors were closed but with a push they opened rather easily and they made their way inside. Benches formed two long lines from the entrance to the main altar but everyone was more focused on the environment. While the light from outside managed to get in through the colored glass on the windows portraying several passages of the Bible the place was rather dark.

“Hello! Anyone here?!” Xenovia called as she stepped forward first and everyone else followed while spreading around the entrance. “Hmm, did we come at a bad time?”

“This place makes me uneasy.” Altria observed as she kept looking around. “Anyone else feels-”

“Like we are being watched?” Shirou knew they weren’t alone, someone else was there hidden in the few shadows around the building.

“That is because you are.” A man’s baritone had them all turning to the altar to find someone standing there at the distance, hands resting on it as the turn of a page could be heard. “Apologies, old instincts acted up when I saw so many concealed swords. Welcome to the House of God, young ones, how may I be of assistance?” He asked while closing his Bible, face involved in shadows.

‘Tall.’ It was the easiest thing to notice about the man. The other was how his body folded in the environment because he was dressed in all black save for a single gold cross around his neck.

There was also how his presence looked far more dangerous than any sort of priest should be as even if he spoke about being on guard there was both a confidence and a control in his tone born from the lack of fear.

His voice was also familiar to Xenovia who couldn’t exactly place who he was but knew something for sure; if she wasn’t careful, they would die. “He is an Executor.”

“Was, Xenovia, was.” He heard despite the woman’s whispering. “How have you been? Griselda was... distressed at your sudden departure. Although I can’t blame you, she will surely have her due in your next meeting.” Everyone watched the blue haired woman wince and the man smiled in amusement. “Please, no need to be afraid. Come closer. As the daughter of my comrade I would extend the welcoming mat even if in the House of God all are already welcomed.”

Gulping loudly at the future that awaited her, Xenovia took a step forward only to be

overtaken by Shirou and Altria who didn't hesitate. 'This man isn't an enemy.' Both realized at the same time. 'For now.' But acknowledged the danger.

Vision adjusting to the dark room, they were suddenly surprised when a light descended from a window above the altar and began to illuminate the area, almost blinding them. A parlor trick and one the priest had prepared in case they were enemies as he felt their approach outside the church.

He had covered the main window, glass depicting Jesus being crucified, with a piece of cloth to reduce visibility in preparation for an attack. But upon sensing no bloodlust nor ill intentions, he pushed a rope and allowed the cover to fall. The window was huge and so the whole church was basked in the sun as the visitors' eyes adjusted to the sudden change.

"Welcome, welcome. Please make yourselves home. God will not judge... for He is dead and can no longer do such." Those words made everyone freeze again as the man offered an honest smile. "And none of you look surprised. I knew you would keep some interesting company, Xenovia."

After the last few words, and with proper light, she finally recognized the man. "You are still a piece of work, Kirei Kotomine."

"And still so polite. One would expect that distance from Griselda would make you more rude but I am happy that her lessons remain with you." Dressed in simple black clothes the man didn't seem to mind the heat despite the long sleeves and pants nor the long coat that while opened would only make the summer heat worse. His dark brown hair was well kept and almost shoulder length like a mullet. "I will make sure to mention it next time I have to make a report." Everyone saw the former Exorcist almost fall like struck. "Or, perhaps, you would want to send another letter. A second one." It was like an arrow hit her chest. "Maybe call her, once in a while. You called, didn't you?"

Dropping to her knees, Xenovia still looked up in rage as Shirou moved to help her up. "Still a dick, Kirei."

"Very good. Isn't it better to be honest about your feelings?" Kirei stepped to the side, his golden cross shining as he descended the altar with hands behind his back. "But, on a more serious note, you really should call her." The blue haired woman grunted but couldn't exactly say he was wrong.

After the interaction there was a pause as Kirei turned to the other visitor and just stood there with a disarming smile. Or what should be a disarming smile but the other three could see how he held himself as a warrior despite the clergy's uniform. There was also something on the back of Shirou's neck that warned him something was wrong.

'Who is this guy?' To avoid being rude, the redhead took another step forward. "Good morning, Father. Apologies for intruding but we came here with a request."

"Is that so?" Kirei's eyes focused fully on the redhead as something on the back of his mind told him there was something wrong. 'This man...'



Both stood there staring at each other for a second before Shirou continued. "I would like to... use the land of the church for a project."

"While God would have no problem lending a helping hand... I must ask, what is this about?" He looked at the others, skipping Xenovia until his eyes finally landed on Le Fay where they stayed for another second. "As you all know, he is dead."

"How did you know we knew?" Asked the smaller magus.

A chuckle escaped Kirei as he closed his eyes and relaxed his shoulders. "Because it isn't every day that two members of the Pendragon Family, a former Exorcist and the Mage of Gremory drop by anyone's church." That made them pause as his eyes remained on Le Fay. "Curiosity aside, the Church is allied to the devils but we aren't responsible for any backroom dealings each other is having. Certainly not I, a mere priest."

"'Mere priest', he says." Xenovia grumbled before pointing to the man. "Griselda always insisted that we should keep an eye on you for some reason. I still say it is because you are a dick."

"True honesty balms my soul. Especially when your mother isn't here to punish you for it." Kirei pointed out, silencing the woman once again. "Regardless, that is something the Church found itself doing for far too long. I wonder what the Father in Heaven would be feeling if He knew we made peace. Interesting times indeed." His eyes turned from Xenovia to Shirou. "Now, I believe introductions are in order, yes? Since Xenovia already gave my name I shall go first; my name is Kotomine Kirei and I am the humble guardian of this church. Yes my father was Japanese, may his soul find rest in the Lord's Abode, and also yes, I was an Executor in the past but I have no interest in retaining that profession."

'In the past, huh?' Altria looked at the man with suspicion even as he kept smiling.

"Emiya Shirou, Magician of Gremory. But you already knew that." Their eyes met each other, both finding the other strange.

"Indeed I do. Although not really because of your standing with the devils as I have met your father before." At the Mage's surprised expression he saw fit to add, "Your real one, not the person in the public records. Those that know Maya would easily believe she could disguise herself as a man but know a man she is not."

"I see..." While Shirou did his best to not appear cautious, something had been given away as Kirei's eyes grew sharper.

"Don't worry, I am not so basic to blame the son for his father's sins. However, I confess that I am curious about what the Magus Killer's Son can do." His eyes shifted to the Pendragon sisters. "Or what he is working on that involves the Khaos Brigade."

"Not the Khaos Brigade, just us." The older sister fixed her posture and bowed slightly out of

respect. "Altria Pendragon and I have requested that Shirou repair a specific sword in return for Caliburn Ruler."

Kirei's eyes went wide in legitimate surprise. "So the time has finally come... Should I start making calls? Caliburn's full resurrection is something several in the Church have interest on." His gaze returned to the redhead. "Especially to watch."

"I don't like working with an audience."

"As expected of a magus. But that raises another question; why are you here? Certainly not to warn us since you... 'don't like working with an audience'."

Deciding to be honest, Shirou motioned for the briefcase in Altria's hands, the woman quickly opening it up to reveal Clarent's shards. "Can you feel it?"

Took a moment of scrutiny but Kirei managed it. "Ah, a curse and you plan to dispel it."

"To say the least. Can we count on your assistance?" Since he knew about Le Fay and Altria's association with the Khaos Brigade he had more than enough reason to refuse.

"Many of my superiors would probably demand my life if I refused since that will directly lead to Caliburn's restoration." Shifting towards the younger magus, he bowed again. "Will you be working with us, young one?"

"Le Fay Pendragon..." Her gaze and posture was more cautious than anyone else but she refused to shy away under Kirei's sight.

Yet the man held a hand over his mouth as his shoulders shook a bit, surprising his unexpected guests. "So we have a Morgan, an Arthur, a Merlin and a Lancelot coming to the church." The names confused half of the present.

"Lancelot? That would be me?" Xenovia asked while pointing to herself.

"Yes. A knight with a sword compared to Excaliburn and considered the strongest by his peers. A King, a magus and a witch as well. Hilarious coincidence, wouldn't you say so, Merlin?" A twitch was all Shirou was willing to give the man. "Yes, yes, truly intriguing the situation we have here."

Feeling her anger boil, Altria managed to hold it back beneath a mask but still allowed some of it out. "Enough of jest." Her tone was firm and commanding, enough to get Kirei's attention. "We have no witches here and certainly no kings. What we have is a mission to repair a sword. Are you going to help, Kotomine Kirei?"

The priest paused for a moment to study the young woman closely before blinking rapidly. "You mean to say 'we don't have a king yet' didn't you?" The blonde swordswoman stared at him with a cold mask, far better than he expected. "Huhuh, then again, what is a King? Devils use the title so lightly that-" Then Altria's foot slammed on the stone floor and for a second the man thought it was going to crack. Despite that her expression remained calm

and collected. "So I see."

His gaze shifted to Shirou who just stared back between the priest and the girl before settling on the man. He was trying to not let his worry show but Kirei caught something in the short interaction and he didn't know what.

"What exactly do you all need? Just to use the territory or anything specific?"

"Holy water, some incense... and if you know any prayers it will speed up my work considerably." Shirou replied without missing a beat.

"All things we have here. Can it be anywhere?"

"So long it is in blessed territory I believe so." The redhead chuckled. "To be honest this is my first time dispelling a sword's curse."

"Living and learning are simultaneous endeavors." Kirei turned to Xenovia and the Pendragon siblings. "Do we need those three?"

"Xenovia will help in cleaning and purifying the sword. As a former Exorcist, few are better indicated." The bluehead nodded at the comment. "But no, Altria and Le Fay don't need to participate."

"Then I have the ideal room for our work." He focused on the blondes. "So long, that is, they watch over the church for me. Nothing like receiving a confession but direct any of the Flock that shows up to either come tomorrow or deliver one of the pamphlets."

"Pamphlets?" Altria and Morgan asked at the same time.

Kirei pointed to a corner close to the entrance and they all saw a table with several stacks of paper. "Why yes. Pamphlets and small Bibles to encourage more people to join the Faith."

"Aren't you a good priest considering God is dead?" Le Fay asked half sarcastically and half curiously.

"When I heard of His death, more specifically why He died, my Faith only grew more unshakable." Nobody would doubt it because evidently Kirei's words were absolutely true. Extending his hand, he waited as Altria closed Clarent's briefcase and delivered it to him. "Now, the small Bibles have the New Testament and several Hymns. They also include the church's schedule."

Altria lowered her head respectfully. "Sounds easy enough. I will also make sure the church remains as you are leaving it."

"Quite a good girl, aren't you. Do you pray?"

"No, not anymore. Also, sorry about my sister. Sometimes she can't hold back her tongue." Le Fay basically proved her point by sticking it out.

“Understandable. Please, make yourselves comfortable. This will probably take a few hours.” Kirei began to walk forward before going around the altar and motioning for Shirou and Xenovia to follow him. “The church has a home inside and one of the rooms is perfect for this.”

“... Thanks for your assistance.” The Mage started to follow, his knight right behind.

“Yeah, thanks, Kotomine.” They went in and began traveling through an open corridor to the garden outside.

It wasn't anything special but both noticed the birds singing and the peaceful environment full of nature. There was the statue of an angel in the center of the garden, the sort that was old and too small to compare with the real deal. Even looking from afar Shirou could see its head had been replaced, telling him it always belonged to that church.

“Here.” Kirei opened the door and they both got inside a very spacious room with a couch, a center table and some cabinets. “Move the table to the side and you can set up as you please.” The priest instructed as he began to open the windows.

“While we won't need to worry about smoke I was half expecting something outside.” Shirou commented as he placed his bag on the floor and began to pull out his tools. Xenovia was doing the same on the other side, the first thing she pulled was a giant bowl.

“This place was abandoned for a while and then corrupted by the fallen angels. It may not look like it but the building has more power than the land itself at the moment.” Kirei lectured as he moved to a cabinet and collected three bottles. “Holy Water as requested.”

“... Not to sound ungrateful but we need more.”

“How much more?”

Moving besides Xenovia the magus removed a huge basin from her bag. “Enough to fill this one and...”

“This one.” The bluehead retrieved another basin slightly smaller than the first. “Mine is for cleaning the weapon to weaken the curse while Master will be using his to cool the blade during the forging.”

“I see...” Kirei began to collect several extra bottles from the cabinet. “Xenovia, you still remember how to make Holy Water, correct? Go and fill those.”

“Eh? Why can't you do it?” Xenovia asked in disbelief.

She wasn't part of the Church anymore and while their sides were allies, technically she could become an enemy at any moment. That was just the nature of a ceasefire which was signed after a war that lasted for too long, Peace Treaty or not.

And Xenovia knew Kirei wasn't the trusting type so there had to be a reason. "Because I wish to talk with Emiya Shirou privately."

"What?" The former Exorcist was confused but could tell the priest was serious. It also meant her guard suddenly grew thither as she stood over the magus protectively.

Shirou was also paying attention and with a sigh he said, "Xenovia, it is fine. He is letting us use the place. I don't mind if he wants to talk."

"And I can see that plenty of those swords would make plenty of noise for you to detect since you are only going to be two doors to our right." Kirei informed Xenovia, not wasting any time.

"Nah, those are more tools than anything else."

"Still, all are sharp and magically powerful."

"Just because of extra runes and a few adjustments." He raised a light red dagger. "This one can produce a constant fire with high heat."

"Interesting."

"This one maintains the temperature of the room stable while this one will keep the water cool enough to quench the blade without slowing down the process."

"I see, I see."

Xenovia watched the interaction before letting out a sigh. "I will be back in five minutes, no more, no less."

"Thanks, Xenovia."

"My thanks as well." Kirei said while passing the bottles and helping her out the door. "But do call your mother."

"Are you going to repeat that until I leave?!" She complained but took it somewhat in stride, leaving the two men alone.

Shirou worked on setting some of his swords in the walls and the floor while also gathering his tools over a blanket. There were three hammers of different sizes, a pair of tongs, a metal stake and gloves.

"Don't you also need an anvil for a proper forge?" Kirei asked with amusement.

"Push the table away, please." The priest did as requested and Shiro raised a hand at the empty space. "**Trace on.**" A second later an anvil occupied that space. He let out a grunt once the Projection was finished. "I would need to get a truck or something to transport an anvil instead of projecting it. Bet you can guess why I didn't."

“A waste of time.”

“Right.”

The car would get unbalanced and just placing it on a huge back would be strange and raise questions unless he found a bag big enough to hide the thing's form. Unfortunately he had none and knew not how to project one so that was the best way to avoid answering unnecessary questions.

Yet it was a perfect match to the anvil on his workshop and he prepared one of the basins to the side while turning on his fire dagger. “It will take a few minutes for it to get hot enough to melt metal and that will only be after we cleaned the sword with Holy Water.” He picked the other one and placed it close to the anvil in a chair. “Can you please-”

“Here.” Kirei gave him the bottles they had and the basin was quickly filled. “I will get the other one.”

“Thank you.” Shirou offered while making sure to not spill a drop. He didn't want to dirt the floor, after all. “You can start whatever you want. I can multitask.”

“Very well.” Kirei took a step back as Shirou worked. “What did you feel the first time you killed someone?” Immediately the redhead stopped. “From what I read in a report it was Matou Shinji. Ironically, just recently you faced his ancestor.” Emiya got back to work as Kotomine added something else. “Don't count Zolgen as dead just yet. Someone as old as him has a habit of sticking around like a cockroach.”

“Trust me, I know that very well.” The Mage replied before turning around. “Any reason for that question?”

Kirei saw the emptiness in Shirou's eyes and smiled. “Once I met your father in the field, he almost killed me.” Considering the Magus Killer's ‘worksheet’ the redhead wasn't surprised. “It was a month after Gabriel stopped me from killing myself,” that did surprise the Mage, “oddly enough my reasons to die hadn't really changed even if I start to find some joy in...”

“Infuriating people? No, that isn't right.” Shirou focused on the priest for a few seconds as the man happily waited for his conclusion. “You like to see them squirm.”

“To see them suffer.” Kirei specified, also noticing how Shirou's fist clenched for a moment before he let go. “In either case I wasn't your father's target on that occasion and we were after the same creature. Logically he saw the benefits of working together but said something curious. ‘I stopped myself because your eyes looked like my son's when we first met’. An odd thing to say to a man just as old as he, don't you think.” He waved in the redhead's direction with glee. “Unless that son was the same as me; empty to the core, at least when you first arrived in the Emiya household.”

“... I felt nothing...” He turned back fully to look at the priest. “You?”

"The same." All amusement left his face as he studied the redhead. "We started both empty."

"It appears so." Recognized the younger man. "But as we are now, we are different." Pointed out Shirou. "What was the first thing that gave you true joy?"

Both knew what he was referring too, to a memory where happiness would have bursted from his chest involuntarily and perfectly. One moment where he truly affirmed what he was and wanted.

"Someone's suffering." Kirei confessed something that made Gabriel cry tears of sadness and embrace him with all of her love. He found her tears funny. "And you?"

"... I helped someone smile." Just the memory was enough to make his lips twitch. Liz's smile hadn't just saved her but showed him a path different from his father's.

"We are two birds of a feather." Commented the older man with an empty tone. "Except we aren't. I was born like this, you were made."

If anything, the Kirei's indifference filled Shirou with pity. "Makes no difference that we started at different points, in the end we are the same animal but of a different breed. Just human but needing something to fill a void most people don't have."

"True, true." Kotomine chuckled again. "Gabriel suggested that I connect with my daughter and we can talk about some things but... I believe that I can only connect with you and the irony is that you are a truly good man while I am an evil one."

"Good men can do evil things and evil men can do good things..." Shirou turned to his tools but his eyes rested on Clarent's briefcase. Opening it calmly, he stared at the shards with a conflicted expression. "Say, Father. I am not a Christian nor do I believe in God." Kirei raised an eyebrow as the redhead smiled to himself. "Can I still make a confession?"

Looking at the redhead with open curiosity, the priest smiled. "Confessions are all about washing the soul and finding forgiveness. One does not need to believe to attain those things. God shall care and hear so long you show sincere regret." He sat down on a chair and turned to the side. "Tell me, my son, what troubles you?"

It wasn't the proper way of doing things but both men felt it fitted them. Neither cared from procedure or tradition and if anything they understood that Shirou just wanted Kirei's opinion. An opinion from someone much like himself, someone who couldn't help but see himself as extremely selfish and self serving.

Although, perhaps, Kirei was the absolutely wrong person to ask what he wanted, Shirou at least knew the evil man wouldn't judge. "I find myself regretting having made a promise today."

"A promise, you say? Do you want to tell me what this promise was? Nothing you say here will reach anyone else's ears, my son." Kirei took the role of listener flawlessly, offering without pushing. "Or you can just speak your mind and I will listen."

“No, if I am talking with someone, I want an opinion.”

“Oh, very well.” His smile had a hidden malice that the redhead knew well. “And what is the promise you plan on breaking?”

Staring at Clarent, Shirou took a deep breath. “I promised to see Caliburn reforged but... If I do it, I will condemn someone to a life much like ours... if not worse.”

“Do tell...” The older man looked excited about the prospect.

The redhead could understand, it was his nature. “For a human to become godlike, they need to give up everything that can bring joy with the exception of duty.” Was the realization he had months ago when he first reforged the Sword of Selection. “An empty life unless you consider joyful making decisions that will doom hundreds every second of every day, a life where the best outcome is not always fair.”

“Like a King but more, is that right?” Kirei scratched his chin in thought. “There are plenty of figures that lived similarly minded lives. I can think of plenty of conquerors who didn’t hesitate to kill many for the prosperity of their kingdom.” But if the answer was so simple the magus wouldn’t be in a dilemma. “No, that would imply that someone like myself could do it. Ah, yes, I understand. Caliburn cannot belong to evil men but to good men. Someone like you.”

“A good woman, in this case.” Altria’s face filled with joy as she ate popped in his mind. “Good grief, I really hate reforging Caliburn right now.”

“Good people care too much, is their best quality and an excellent mean of torture. With Caliburn they would forever guard the happiness of others but be unable to taste it themselves.” Sounded like an existence that Kirei would enjoy to watch and he was sorely tempted to give bad advice just to see it happen. But he had a duty. “You can break the promise but a good man would never stoop so low. Which means you are going to reforge Caliburn... Or that isn’t the promise you are planning to break?”

“... Do you know about the Order of Pendragon?” After a nod the magus went forward. “They wait for the new King to show up even now. To keep them happy I promised, in the open and implicitly, that I would make sure said King would come and I would deliver Caliburn to them.” Shirou gritted his teeth and punched the floor. “And they are right on waiting, someone worthy of the Sword of Selection will be a Savior who will unite people and bring peace.”

“While driving themselves insane by isolation and the inability of attaining their own happiness.” Kirei hummed at the thought. “And she is already willing to take the burden, isn’t she?”

“I don’t think she understands the consequences. No, she does, and is just willing to make the sacrifice.” ‘Again.’ But he wasn’t going to tell Kirei about Altria being a reincarnated Artoria. He was an evil man, after all. “To stop her I will have to do something vile, something



I really don't want to do but I can't see any other option." Which truly ate Shirou up from the inside. "I will have to stain her splendor by planting a dark seed that will stop her from drawing the weapon..."

"Denying the world a Savior by committing an evil act... Truly you are a good man." Kirei chuckled at Shirou's anguish as he was going to do the opposite of what he wanted.

He was going to plunge someone good, kind and brave into darkness to protect their Humanity by stealing their smile. The damage that could cause may even break Altria or cause irreparable differences between the two of them.

And Shirou was going to do it, he wasn't asking Kirei's permission or asking to be stopped, just confessing the sin he was ready to commit. Not that the priest would stop him in any case, his superiors never mentioned a Savior and just imagining the scene tingled the exact right bone on his body.

"So, that is my confession."

"You will do as you must." Kotomine threw a small blessing over Shirou's head and stood up. "I shall pray for your success."

"Of course you will." Shirou finished setting up the mold, Altering it to make sure it was ideal for Clarent's shape. "Either way, Caliburn will be completed today. After that..."

"After that it is all implied so you can break as many promises as you want. Only you will know in the end." The priest commented. "Well, you and God."

That last one got both men chuckling and Xenovia returned just in time to see the scene. "You two seem to be getting along." Funnily enough she swore they would be fighting instead.

"Didn't your mother teach you that having amicable relationships with your co-workers is the best policy? Tut, tut, tut. Griselda is slipping." She was fuming at his words.

"Ignore him, Xenovia. She will be proud of the woman you became one way or another." Before any response could be given he placed a basin in front of Kirei and threw the briefcase by its side. "And you, stop teasing my knight and do your job. Time to purify a sword."

Realizing Shirou wasn't going to let him have his fun, Kirei shrugged and collected the first shard. "As you wish."

What followed next was over an hour of the former Exorcist and Executor working together to clean the shards as the man offered several different prayers to them. In any other occasion those sort of rites would be used to bless weapons and bullets, making them strong enough to harm beings like devils.

However Mordred's curse was strong as were her emotions when dying with Clarent. The

love, the hatred, the despair. Only Shirou knew exactly what had tinged the weapon on such a fervent red. He would tell no soul about it, the only one who needed to know was living a new life and he wouldn't want to ruin it.

'That could be the seed you need...' Kiritsugu's voice popped in his mind as he tended the forge. 'If you are right and she is Artoria reborn-'

'You would want me to sacrifice her for everyone else's sake.' The redhead knew that would eventually backfire. Perhaps it would imbalance Altria for a moment but Mordred's sins weren't her own.

To be more precise she was Altria and not Artoria even if he was right and she was the reincarnation of the latter. Unless she suddenly remembered her past life, divulging Mordred's true feelings would only serve to humiliate the fallen knight. Perhaps, if she believed him it would be different but then he could end up facing a furious incarnation of King Arthur.

No, what he needed was a different approach and while he had no ideas to strike Altria personally he could confront her directly. 'Either way this is going to suck.'

Looking closely to the shards he noticed Xenovia offering him one. "First order done."

Collecting it the Mage felt no curse. "First to go." He began working on melting those as the two finished the rest. "I made a terrible mistake." The two stared at him with concern. "We won't be having dinner at home."

"Fuck!"

"Language." While Kirei barely understood what had Xenovia upset he could see the monumental task before them.

Clarent needed to be well taken care of before anything else could be done and there was also Caliburn for Shirou to worry about. In either case all that work would need time and at present they had to deal with the potential cursed Noble Phantasm first and foremost.

Unfortunately some of the original blade would be lost because of the process but the redhead had a solution for it. From his bag he collected a huge rock made from several metals, including some of which were discovered much later after Clarent's original creation.

Using his magecraft he would bond the new metal with the older making the blade even stronger. His goal was something superior to Caliburn even if he knew there wouldn't be enough abilities on the weapon to assure such a thing.

Yet the blade would be stronger nevertheless with the addition of tungsten and titanium which it previously lacked. And then, once completed, the weapon would evolve into a Noble Phantasm. Even if Altria rejected it in the end it wouldn't be because of weakness, that Shirou could guarantee.

Thanks to his Origin and tools it wasn't long before Clarent's new body was done and would need just be hammered in. Unlike Japanese techniques, the Britons who made the proto Noble Phantasm didn't use many foldings. They worked the metal to perfection while imbuing it with mana and power thanks to its materials, plenty of which remained even when the weapon melted.

So the Mage of Swords had the work cut out for him as he hammered, warmed and cooled the weapon for two hours without pause. Xenovia stood by his side from beginning to end, tending to him and helping in small ways as Kirei left a couple of times to get incense and water.

Every time the half forged blade was cooled they all could feel part of the curse being left behind in the basin where the Holy Water resided. Whatever didn't turn into vapor ended up cursed with a power that should belong on a Noble Phantasm. Which would undoubtedly do so if Shirou wasn't too stubborn for his own good.

Its smell was somewhat toxic but that was what the incense was for and Kirei had to respect the foresight to prepare it. "Are we sure that curse wasn't born of some sort of evil? Mordred was Morgan le Fay's son after all."

"No evil, just feelings. Some good, mostly bad." Shirou's explanation was vague but he was too focused on the task to care.

Afternoon was around the corner when the Mage found himself on the last few steps of his work. The other two present could feel the new aura around Clarent as the blade gained new form and it was elevated beyond what it once was.

For the first time in their lives the three watched the Crystallization of a Legend. The very second Shirou was done the sword fixed itself in the fabric of existence as its History and Legend resonated with the World.

They all could feel the air shake as it overpowered any blessings and protections the small church had, taking over that corner of the town for a moment as the sword's power was great enough to decimate it if fully unleashed.

However it wasn't being fully unleashed, it was just greeting the World and introducing itself as Shirou felt its name and Legend proving it was the real deal. Funnily enough it wasn't just his Reality Marble which received the information as Xenovia and Kotomine felt the exact same things.

The birth of a Noble Phantasm left a mark in their souls.

"Fascinating." Commented Kirei as he turned to the redhead. "You could have told us that Mordred suffered so much for it."

"It wasn't my tale to tell." He replied while standing up, carefully holding Clarent for he had a feeling the blade would cut him even if by accident.

“And to think that King Arthur’s son... Artoria’s daughter loved her so much.” Xenovia couldn’t hold back a few tears. “And so much hate...”

“Rejection is a dangerous thing.” The priest pointed out as he stared at the weapon, mesmerized.

Clarent had no longer any red in it, the blade looked as if it was made of pure silver much like when it was first forged centuries ago. If Shirou didn’t know any better he would say that the sword was made of pure silver but obviously it wasn’t. Several metals went on it and despite its perfection and immaculate appearance he knew the Noble Phantasm was made with several materials.

Still his work had been a success as even before it ascended into a Noble Phantasm, Clarent had been reforged perfectly. All the transformation did was fix its existence in the World and elevate its power further but nothing else had changed.

“The curse is fully gone.” Xenovia celebrated. “Master, should I go call Altria?”

“No. We will deliver the sword and...” Turning to the priest he asked, “Kirei, can we still use the church for one more work?”

“If it is one as interesting as this I see no problem allowing it.” Already the man could guess what it was. “Would you two like me to make something? As a host I believe lunch should be served.”

“No need.” Shirou shulled his bag until he found a blue scabbard he had prepared for Clarent. If the sword clicked in it perfectly it meant his work had truly been flawless. “First, we need to return this to its owner.” It fitted exactly as intended. Truly the sword of Mordred but without the Knight of Betrayal’s influence.

Yet something didn’t feel right and he drew it immediately. His work had been perfect so it wasn’t its shape nor its weight. When he looked at his reflection Emiya could see himself as if it was a mirror. But looking at his image he felt another set of eyes glaring at him with defiance.

Shirou stared at the Noble Phantasm for a moment before Projecting a piece of cloth and cleaning it up as Mordred would before a battle. ‘This is the last time we can call it your sword but please, let it go.’ He prayed gently for the knight, hoping her soul could hear it wherever it was. Once he was finished the Mage stood up and sheathed it one final time. “Let’s go.”

Back at the church’s main hall Altria sat on a bench patiently while savoring her sister’s cookies. While Le Fay wasn’t the best cook, the desserts and treats she could make were some of the best and some of her siblings’ favorite sweets.

From a magic circle she also collected a thermos with coffee which both were sharing as the girl’s legs kicked up and down in a bench too tall for her. Both noticed the other’s return and Kirei was the first to speak.

“Eating in the church is frowned upon unless on certain occasions. Using magic is worse.”

“But you are working with him.” Le Fay pointed at Shirou, noticing but ignoring the sword in his hand. “You wanna tell me he forged a Noble Phantasm and didn’t use a single bit of magic.”

The priest chuckled. “He asked permission.” He loved how her face fell at the simple argument.

Altria stood up from her seat, cleaned her mouth and approached Shirou who also walked towards her. Both met in the middle of the church and only then did her eyes move from the redhead to Clarent. The Pendragons felt the Noble Phantasm and even then its Crystallized status could be felt if one paid close attention.

“You really did get rid of the curse.” She stated in a congratulatory and admiring tone. “May I?”

“It is your sword, isn’t it?” He didn’t hesitate to give her the blade despite the question feeling hollow as hundreds of words were exchanged with their gazes alone. Altria unleashed the weapon and took several steps back before swinging it a few times, testing its weight. “Heavy, isn’t it?”

“Quite.” Using both hands the blonde moved in a familiar sequence of three slashes before pulling Clarent back close to her face to then drop with a crouch and attack an invisible enemy. “More so than Caliburn Ruler but...”

Her eyes began to shine as Altria began to move at high speeds and throw several attacks at imaginary opponents. Every slash distorted the air with its swing but the sword touched nothing as the woman executed some complicated jumps and motions with the weapon.

The initial strikes were hardly perfect but soon she adapted to Clarent’s weight and the blade became an extension of Pendragon’s arm. Her stance grew flawless in minutes as well practiced blows transitioned into each other seamlessly. Shirou and Xenovia were certainly impressed even if the former found her form all too familiar.

‘She has to be Artoria’s reincarnation... There is no other explanation. Her movements...’ Another woman overlapped with her as Shirou watched both move in perfect sync. His fist shook as he hardened his resolve as Altria finished her exercise. “So? Does it meet your expectations?”

“It surpassed all of them.” Altria acknowledged with a smile as she admired the blade’s beauty.

“Hey, did you make it into a Noble Gear?” Le Fay asked cautiously as her hat hid her face.

Shirou turned to the younger magus with a frown. “It... Altria should learn how to use the weapon first before I make any changes.” He spoke the truth as best as he could, avoiding

mentioning Altria maybe wouldn't have the sword for long. As they all knew what weapon she truly wished to claim. "And I still need to finish Caliburn today."

"True." The older Pendragon said before placing Clarent back on its sheath and leaving it at a bench as she picked up Caliburn Ruler.

Quickly she removed it from its cloth and Shirou was left there staring at the last piece of the Sword of Selection. Without saying any words she approached the Mage and offered the naked sword which had him hesitating for the first time in a while. It lasted barely a moment as he knew stalling would do no good.

Grasping the last of Caliburn Fragments, the Mage knew exactly what needed to be done. "I already asked Father Kotomine to allow us one more use of his facilities." The priest offered a bow, a pleased smile on his face.

"What for?" Altria asked as she took a step back and retrieved Clarent.

"Last time I combined the Fragments it was out of despair and a rough job at best." Shirou confessed as he stared at Ruler. "This time I have some time and since this is the last Fragment I need to make sure everything is in order."

"But Caliburn will be reforged today..." She didn't turn to him as many unsaid things were exchanged between them.

"Yes, it will." He could read her intent clear as day and after a moment decided to bring out his. "You should go and practice with Clarent."

"Should I?"

"Should she?" Unlike her sister who sounded nonplused, Le Fay sounded surprised and even excited.

"Yeah. Get used to the feeling and learn how to manage a real Noble Phantasm. Did you get Clarent's True Name?"

"Radiant Royal Sword Clarent." Altria replied as she held her sword. She could feel its power calling for her in a way Caliburn never could.

Reading that from her posture alone, Shirou smiled with hope in his eyes. "Then go and figure out how to wield it properly. It will take hours to get Caliburn ready, enough time to get some training in."

Once more, much was unsaid and his hopes were dashed when she asked, "And when will you be ready?"

Taking a deep breath he replied, "20:00 at Kuoh. Caliburn will be fully revived then." Closing his eyes he chuckled. "Almost want to do it at midnight..."

Most present didn't understand but they all heard Le Fay struggle to hold back a laugh. "Because of Gawain?"

"Well, if Galatine was supposed to be Excalibur's sibling and Caliburn could be their uncle..."

Altria caught on quickly and allowed a small laugh to escape. "Gawain was stronger with the sun. Not his sword. And it needed to be about three hours before noon for him to get all the benefits." Still she could appreciate the attempt at a joke. "You should start at nine."

"But your brother must be so worried." Shirou pointed out making both Pendragons flinch. "I know I would if I left on a date and my sister disappeared for more than a day."

"That sounds extremely rude." Kirei pointed out.

"And selfish." Xenovia couldn't help but join in.

"Fine, do as you please." Altria seized all amusement by throwing a challenging glare. "You better be ready. Let's go, Fay."

The blonde magus jumped to her feet and retrieved her stuff with magic before passing by Shirou. "Good luck." He could hear the sincerity in her voice as she understood Caliburn's cost.

Which gave him strength to do what was necessary as the siblings left the church and he glared at Caliburn Ruler in his hand. "Oh I will be ready alright."

"Master, do you want me to do it?" Xenovia's question surprised Shirou and when he saw the determined glare still fixed at the closed doors from where the two departed. "If you need someone to break your enemies... I am your woman."

"It is dirty work, not proper for a real knight."

"On the contrary. Most knights dirt their hands so their lords can look like paragons because someone needs to do the deed." With a swift movement she dropped to a knee in front of him, head low. "You want to save her but her resolve is too strong, far stronger than mine. Let me crush her so we don't have to watch Caliburn do it."

The Mage of Swords was sure Xenovia hadn't heard his talk with Kotomine but she didn't need to. She knew Shirou better than most, including how he both admired and hated Caliburn's existence. Every attempt to talk Altria out from taking the Sword of Selection had failed and she knew he was going to do something drastic.

"If it is about defeating her-" She stopped when his hand rested on her head.

"Thank you Xenovia. To be honest, I don't know what to do with this." He confessed, staring at his reflection in Caliburn Ruler. "I already know that I will deny the World a Savior but how to go about it... either I will do something truly unforgivable that will forever stain my hands or I will figure something else out."

“Then let me-”

“I love you.” Those words silenced her and she found herself blushing. “Asking you to do this, would be spitting on that love. So please, don’t ask.”

“Huhuhuhu.” Kirei intruded in the small moment. “While resisting temptation is always a good thing, the fact it is there shows you want it. Shows you can’t do what is necessary.” He approached the redhead and placed a hand on his shoulder. “How do you plan to stain her splendor when you can’t even see yourself do it? Immaculate, perfect, honorable and brave.” Looking at a glaring Xenovia for a second he added. “They are quite similar as well. Would you be trying to stop yourself from harming two people at once?”

After a few heartbeats Shirou raised a brow and asked, “Done?”

“For now.” The older man stepped back. “Regardless if you are going to do the unthinkable, think of a solution or fail in general, I hope you don’t mind if I am there to watch the show.”

“Oh no, I insist.” The reply surprised Kirei. “If anything with you there will stop your superiors from yapping on my ear about not warning anyone about Caliburn’s return. So please, come to Kuoh. Bring some popcorn for what I care.”

“Master...” The knight stood up again and took hold of his hand. “Maybe we should call the others and make a plan? Or stall and not reforge Caliburn today.”

It would be a lie to say Shirou hasn’t thought about that, at least the latter option. “Altria is someone who values honor and if I try to undermine her like that I don’t think she will hear my words.” And he would need every edge he could get. Then his memories of Artoria crossed his mind. “She will respect conviction so long as it is direct. As long as I do that, I can get her to listen to me and if not... I can bring her down.”

“Then I suggest you get back to work. You two can use the same room from before.” Kirei offered as he sat down in a chair and pulled out a Bible. Both were surprised he still read the book. “Since it will end in combat, you will need to be well rested. Please just don’t fall to the temptations of luxury back there. It would be very inappropriate.”

“I wouldn’t do that in a church.” Xenovia mumbled with a blush. She didn’t respect the institution but still loved God.

Shirou chuckled and began to make his way back. “That is one of the reasons why I chose that time; to get some rest.” He raised Caliburn with a smile. “Preparing the last Fragment to complete the sword is going to take just an hour or two. I will get enough time to prepare, and rest.” That and also most students would be out of school. “Probably will also give everyone else time to prepare.” ‘Depending how things went, a boundary field won’t be a bad idea.’

Kirei chuckled as he thought of similar lines. “Then I wish the best of luck, Emiya Shirou. You are going to need it.”



His words were sincere even if the tone made it sound otherwise so the redhead nodded and left the room with Xenovia in tow.

While he had hours to prepare the Mage suspected that he would need every single second but that was fine. He had been playing around with several ideas to increase his odds and completing Caliburn wouldn't take long.

Surpassing Altria, on the other hand, would be the real challenge.

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"It's so pretty." Ise heard one of the girls in his classroom and couldn't help but grit his teeth.

"Are those real emeralds?"

"Anyone else feeling the love in the air?" Took some effort but the Red Dragon Emperor remained calm.

"So romantic." Just barely. Protecting his friend was keeping his head occupied as several students tried to approach and he body blocked them as gently as possible.

Didn't stop their words to reach the former nun. "Asia, Asia, can you introduce us to Astaroth-san?"

"I- hmm- I barely- I mean- We just-" Despite Ise and Irina watching her back, the Bishop was more than a little overwhelmed.

The reason for that was a box the students found over her table after lunch break, as big as her head. Thanks to the blunder from the previous day nobody had any doubt who the gift was from and obviously everyone was curious. And since the teacher hadn't arrived, several students insisted that Asia opened the gift.

The girl hesitated, Irina tried to push back and Ise jumped to her side but remained frozen as he stared at the package with a pit opening in his chest. People shouted and spoke over each other as the classroom descended into chaos.

It was then that Asia opened the gift hoping that once everyone saw whatever it was they would calm down. It was a lean jewelry box of the expensive sort with lines of gold in its frame and quickly someone suggested she opened it despite some protest saying that was the present itself.

Before any other discussion could start she just opened the lock and everyone stared with wide eyes as a necklace made of emeralds, a huge one in its center where it should rest on her throat should Asia wear it.

Suffice to say several girls giggled and squealed at the gift as all boys in the room bowed in defeat with some even crying as Asia was considered off 'the market'. It was just a logical

conclusion as a girl caught a glimpse of Diodora's name on the note and they felt it was impossible to compete.

Despite the reveal excitement didn't die down as the students grew more agitated by her extravagant gift. They started to throw all manner of questions, united in the quest to know more about Asia Argento's love life.

Which made Ise furious and frustrated as he held himself back from doing something he would really regret. "Stop bothering her."

"We are just curious." One of the girls commented as keeping a wide bent from him, choosing to confront Irina instead.

Who also felt an increase in her frustration as being surrounded by students trying to interrogate her friend wasn't a fun experience. "Didn't any of you ever hear that 'curiosity killed the cat'?" The honey haired girl dearly wished she could get her sword at that moment. 'Starting to think coming back to school was a bad idea. And where is the teacher?'

"Hey girls, can we not do this again?" Aika came to the rescue, arriving just in time to grab one of the boys by the ear and pull him back. "I expected such behavior from the Perverted Trio but that Ise is being sensible here just shows how stupid you guys are!"

"Hey, don't compare us to those perverts!" Another of the girls shouted while pointing to Matsuda who jumped in his seat.

"We aren't messing with Asia-chan like you all are!"

"Not helping much either!" Ise complained about his friends but Motohama fixed his classes before replying.

"With our reputation, chances are that the girls are going to blame us for something."

"Valid but still an excuse. A word from Asia and you would probably be forgiven but you only have yourself to blame for the bad rep." Some were surprised that Aika would agree with her fellow pervert but she didn't give anyone a chance to dwell on it. "And the rest of you, get away from Asia or else..."

"Or else, what?" Another student challenged with her arms crossed beneath her breasts, trying to appear bigger.

A malicious glint shone in Aika's glasses. "What about worrying about your boyfriend who was cheating with Marika?"

"Is that true?!" Immediately the two girls began to fight to the side as Kiryuu's focus shifted to the others.

"Stop pestering about Asia-chan's life until you get one of your own." Some winced, others tried to remain defiant. "Maybe we should talk about how one of you tried to leave messages

on Kiba-kun's locker even when he was already taken?" She didn't need to name anybody, many of them retreated and those to stay were quick to follow with just a glance.

Everyone had dirt under the carpet or something they were ashamed about and Aika wasn't afraid to use it. Worse for the majority of the students was that counterattack was impossible, much like the Perverted Trio she wore her flaw, her pervertedness, as a badge of honor.

But unlike them Kiryuu was considered a proper student who managed to remain in the social boundaries and leave her perversion in the open just enough for everyone to know about it but never enough it would be considered wrong.

There was a reason her favorite targets were her fellow perverts who could fight back but never complain. "Thanks for the save, Kiryuu." Ise watched as the other students returned to their seats while others started conversations around the classroom.

Getting to her feet, Asia bowed to her friend. "Yes. Thank you very much, Aika-chan."

"Don't sweat it. What are friends for." She took the jewel from the Bishop's hands and shoved it on its box before giving it back. "Put it in your bag and ask the guy to stop sending stuff to school or we are going to be doing this every day."

It didn't help that from flowers to jewelry it was quite a jump of gifts even from a normal person's perspective, especially those who wouldn't know how rare the flowers of the previous day were.

Just receiving another gift would have Asia as the center of attention for weeks unless something else happened, receiving one obviously expensive as a collar of emeralds was bound to have an even more volatile reaction.

Aika knew it wasn't her friend's fault and couldn't help but think, 'If I ever get my hands on this 'Diodora' I will teach him what gifts are appropriate or not,' with a great deal of irritation.

Looking at her new box with a conflicted expression, Asia replied, "I don't know how to tell Diodora-san to stop."

"You just say 'stop giving me priceless gifts'. Is he trying to pressure you, Asia?" Her irritation turned to rage. "Because if so then this is even worse and we should-"

"No, he is just thankful because I helped him once..." But the girl blushed and Aika noticed.

"Asia-chan, I know you are shy but-"

"She means we have no way to talk with Diodora-san." Irina explained casually prompting the other girl to look at her.

"Do you know the guy?" After a shake of the head, Aika blinked. "And did nobody hear about a phone?" There was no helping it, she also was curious.

“He is part of an old family. A really old family.” Irina knew she was feeding the rumor mill but she had no choice.

Knowing that a lot of people were hearing them, Aika couldn't help but sigh. “This is bullshit.” She could see the pressure Asia was under not only because of the other students but the gifts themselves.

“Fraid so.” Irina nodded in full agreement. “But it's a mess that can wait for later. Class 's about to start.”

Everyone began to settle down as the teacher arrived and for the moment the name 'Diodora' disappeared from everyone's lips. But it was still on the minds of many either due to curiosity, interest or rage.

Pure rage that Ise fought to hold back. 'Stop it.' The weeks in the forest came back to him, the memory of being challenged and insulted, of punishing those who would steal from him with fury. 'Stop it!'

[Can you pipe it down? Your thoughts are so loud I can't even take a nap.] Ddraig shook Ise's spirit with his presence, making the Pawn freeze in place.

'Right, sorry, Ddraig. My bad.' The brown haired boy tried to focus on class but while his thoughts weren't as loud they were still in a loop.

Usually not in the mood to stay awake when his Partner was at school, the dragon decided to ask, [What is the matter now? Diodora again?] Even if Ise didn't reply, the Red Dragon Emperor could hear his thoughts. [Hmm, that is quite an expensive gift. One would think Asia Argento is already his fiance or something like that.] When he felt the frustration build up on the Pawn's mind, the dragon almost chuckled. [Oho~ so that is the issue~]

'Forget about it, you damn lizard.' Ise felt a 'blow' in his head before his face met his desk. “What the f-”

“Hyoudou? Is my class boring you?” The teacher asked as he and all students turned to the brown haired boy who blushed at the attention as some laughed.

“No, Sensei, just feeling a little tired after gym...” Considering everything, nobody unaware of his status would challenge that excuse and the teacher relented. Ise would have to both apologize and thank Liz for her brutal classes later. 'Seriously! How the fuck?! Since when can you do that?!'

[As our connection grows stronger the more I can do for you and to you. Or did you forget that Albion could also help his Partner fight?] His rival name was said with anger and grumbling respect but the Pawn got the message. [But back to what is interrupting my nap, if you have problems with that Diodora guy just fight him.] Feeling the expected confusion from the boy, Ddraig asked, [Haven't you learned anything on Tannin's territory? You want something, you take it.]

'This isn't- are you- why-' The Pawn felt his hand crushing the pen he was holding and quickly let it go before staining his hand. His book still got covered with ink but he didn't care. 'This 's Asia we're talking about!'

[And?] Ddraig could hear Ise gritting his teeth. [Weren't you just complaining that Diodora was going to take her? Beat him up and get her back. Or get her first.]

'She 's- she 's- she's a person you bastard lizard!' Disappointment poured from the dragon but Ise didn't care. 'That isn't how relationships are supposed to work and Asia-chan... Diodora could take care of her...'

[Yes, and so could you. From what I felt you are stronger than him.] Huffing a little the dragon could feel all the insecurity rolling from the Pawn and he hated it. [It isn't like those trinkets can be worthy more than the protection of the Red Dragon Emperor.] His words had little effect so he tried something different. [If you want to get her a gift, do it. What is stopping you?]

Snorting quietly, the Pawn retorted. 'Oh, I don't know, the lack of money?'

[Then go around and take it from someone else.]

'Asia would hate me.' Replied Ise while cleaning his desk. 'She would hate anything stolen and... and it isn't like I can buy anything like that...' He added while looking to the Bishop's desk or the necklace hidden in its compartment. 'But with him Asia can be a noble and-'

[And with time you can give her all that stuff. You are the Red Dragon Emperor for crying out loud. My Host! When we roar, the gods shake in fear!]

'But Diodora can make her happy now!' Ise rebutted, staring at his empty desk.

Changing tactics again, Ddraig huffed. [Then we beat Diodora up and take his stuff.]

Getting annoyed, Ise made sure to send his irritation to the dragon. 'I already said Asia wouldn't like that.'

[Hoh? But you just said Diodora could give her everything she wanted and we could just take anything from him.]

'That-'

[Does she look happy with the gift or upset?] At the question Ise tried to look at her but only seeing her back the Pawn couldn't find anything other than her lowered shoulders and head. [Try to remember her expression, Partner. Was she smiling when she saw the necklace? Laughing?] No, she wasn't. Even if he was confused, Ise was sure of it. [Gifts are only important when they have value to both the gifter and receiver. As it stands, Asia Argento was more confused and upset about the gift than you because she didn't want it but can't outright reject it.]

The logic was sound and good enough that even Ise understood. 'But he can make her happy...'

Still the brown haired boy couldn't forget the power and resources that a pureblood devil had. Diodora was like Rias and his King had enough money to buy a country while keeping her people satisfied. Not only that but if they received the same education it wasn't farfetched to assume the Astaroth Heir would be a capable individual who could watch over the former Holy Maiden.

However Ddraig reminded him of something important. [It isn't up to you to decide what will make her happy or not. Only Asia can answer that question.] The Original Red Dragon Emperor grunted at the self doubt in his Partner's spirit. [Or are you saying a gift like that is enough for Asia to fall in love with someone?]

'Of course not!'

[Then forget about it and be a man! Talk with her!] Silence descended between the two as they could just hear the teacher's lecture with half an ear. [Tsk. I hate how you humans do things. If dragons want a mate we just prove we are worthy and that is that.]

'Yeah but... that is that and this is this.' Dropping his head on the table gently, Ise hid it with his arms. 'Ddraig... do you think I'm worthy? Not as your Host but... as a person?'

Before the dragon could even begin to unpack that sentence they both felt the phone in Ise's pocket shake. Since he was in class the Pawn wasn't going to pick it up but changed his mind when he noticed Irina and Asia both looking at their phones stealthily. He could see his childhood friend's face and her shock was obvious even if it was gone in an instant.

That was more than enough to get both of them curious so Ise opened his damaged book to hide his phone before fishing it from his pocket. 'What the hell? Shirou sent everybody a message?'

[Caliburn will be reforged today huh.] There was other stuff written but that was what grabbed Ddraig's attention. [We are going to watch.]

'Buchou just replied that we don't need-'

[We are going to watch.] The dragon replied firmly. [My flames were used in the initial forging of that blade and I am really interested to see if it was worth it. By the way, if not, we are destroying it to save me the embarrassment.]

Besides the protections around the sword Ise doubted that people would just let him break Caliburn just because Ddraig said so. Certainly Shirou and the Church wouldn't like even an attempt on it. Not after the whole work that took to fix the thing in the first place.

'So, no deals today... there goes another chance to make a buck...'

[You are an idiot, Partner.]

Ise wasn't in the mood to disagree.

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Classes were long done and most clubs closed their activities for the day. Those that didn't were coaxed by the boundary field around Kuoh to leave as soon as possible. With all those factors it wasn't a surprise that the school was mostly empty way before the arranged time.

Empty as the place was, there were still those who waited for the events to start under the stars. "Michael is going to be pissed." Azazel chuckled as he drank a can of beer while sitting on the ground.

"Drinking at school is frowned upon, Azazel-sensei." Sona chastised while crossing her arms and watching the lone sword at the center of the field. "Hopefully that thing will finally leave our property."

"Oh, I don't know. Plenty of our students consider it a 'tourist attraction' of sorts." Akeno commented as she sat in an unfolded chair with Medusa by her side. The goddess was enjoying a basket of fruits as her priestess looked around the area. "Wonder who else is coming."

"Kiba for sure." Rias also was sitting in a chair but that was more inclined as she kept her eyes closed. The woman had changed into a pair of shorts and dark red top with a black undershirt after the meeting. "Asia will want to come for emotional support and Ise dragged with them by default. What about yours, Sona?"

"I told them they didn't need to come so I honestly don't know." She took off a pocket watch and clicked her tongue. "He could have scheduled this for sooner. Or later."

"Shiro doesn't want to put on a show." Rias was quick to defend her lover even as she remained relaxed in her chair. "Can you imagine how many people would drop by to watch Caliburn be fully restored. It will be chaos."

Azazel nodded in agreement. "Just the Church is going to insist on a bigger delay to get everybody set up. Bet the Pope will want to come. And all his Cardinals. Michael would probably approve too, the bleeding heart." He took another swing of his beer but the can was empty. Shrugging, he placed it to the side and got another one. "Explain why so many figures are in Japan would be a mess in itself."

Watching the fallen angel take another gulp of beer, Medusa asked what many wanted. "Is that affecting you in the slightest?"

"No, but I like to pretend." Admitted the Cadre with another shrug. "Caliburn gives me some bad memories."

Some could sympathize with the man while others could only wonder what he was feeling. "That isn't an excuse to drink on campus." Commented Sona, making Azazel laugh.

"Girl, you have a college here." He pointed to the giant building on the horizon with its lights on. Classes were in session but boundary fields would keep students away from the area. "I will renounce women for the rest of my life if one or two students aren't drinking right now."

"It still isn't allowed and you are a teacher." The rebuttal came without fanfare.

Finishing his can of beer, Azazel placed it to the side with the other and took no more. "Fine, fine. Should at least have brought something to eat." Akeno threw him an apple. "My favorite niece." He joked before taking a bite as his eyes noticed something. "Despite the show being too soon, we are already gathering quite the crowd. By the way, you were wrong, Sona."

The Cadre's was referring to the arriving Peerages, both fully present and with the addition of Rin who looked to be calm on the surface but he could see a storm of emotions behind her cold mask of indifference.

Unlike many Azazel didn't know what happened over the summer but he could tell there was a shift in attitude from the Tohsaka Head. As a magus she had always been curious and dedicated but over the last few days she had asked several questions many wouldn't dare to ask.

Questions that the fallen angel found himself answering to her, Luvia and Rias, the sort of information that pointed to a goal; How to kill a god.

While not asked directly, Azazel was far from stupid and anyone who did their proper research would know he took down a Pantheon or two. But even then it wasn't a simple affair for attacking a god usually meant war. He also understood that whatever the situation was it was far from being simple.

If the enemy was weak, Rias would have already solved the problem and if they were too strong a war would have already started. Even if the Cadre couldn't figure out everything, he was smart enough to piece together some theories.

Theories he preferred to ignore at the moment. "So, the whole gang's here. Is Kiba going to challenge our Mage to stop the reforming of Caliburn?"

The blond blushed but didn't avert his eyes. "I won't interfere. If anything, I find being here proper since many of my siblings would love seeing the blade whole."

"That is the same for most of us." Issei commented while fixing his glasses.

"What do you mean?" Sona asked with concern as several of her peerage had hard looks in their eyes.



Tsubaki stepped in front of them and lowered her head. "Apologies Kaichou but I didn't tell you that some of us have... had problems because of that sword. Or the events surrounding it."

"Kokabiel." The name made many of the Sitri shiver as the Gremory stepped aside and watched the interaction. "I wouldn't blame any of you, I had problems myself." She waved to Kuzuki who was patiently waiting for the event to begin. "It was one of the many reasons why I approached Souichirou-sensei."

Momo scratched her arm shyly. "Maybe it is because we never felt so weak after Reincarnation but I can't forget that night." A hand landed on her shoulder.

It was Saji. "I think nobody can but... watching this will help?." He doubted his own words yet most members of their peerage nodded in agreement, moving their King's heart.

"My, my. What a sense of comradeship." Rias teased even as she sat up and looked at her peerage. "And you all? Just here for Kiba or is there anyone else with issues related to our least favorite Cadre?"

"That implies we have a favorite Cadre, Buchou..." Luvia commented off hand and Azazel dramatically held his chest. "Since I wasn't personally involved, I decided to come because I didn't want to get back home alone."

"And I am here to speak with Emiya." Rin folded her arms and looked around with some irritation. "Where is he, anyway? If the ritual is going to start soon, he should be preparing."

Luvia grabbed Rin's arm and whispered in her ear. "I don't think that idea is going to work. Our families have both struggled with replicating that success for centuries."

"It is a sword and he has a Reality Marble." The black haired girl hissed but quickly calmed down. "He is about to reforge the Sword of Selection for goodness sake. What is that if not another step up the ladder?"

"Is it even going to be a ritual of some sort?" Setsuna asked out loud. "How did he do it the first time?"

"By almost blowing up the city." Rias informed as several people winced or tried to not remember how they almost became dust. "Besides, he is preparing somewhere else..."

"You have no idea." Azazel observed and the redhead shrugged.

Akeno was the one who replied, "I doubt anyone on the planet has any idea how to reforge Caliburn but Shirou-kun."

"At least the night is nice." Asia commented as a gentle wind brushed her hair.

"Sure, a nice night, a sword to be fixed and we still have to wait another ten minutes." Rin began to massage her temples.

“You can leave, Tohsaka. Don’t worry. We will make sure to tell how an event of a lifetime that probably will never be repeated went.”

“Shut it, Luvia. Some of us don’t have a devil’s constitution that lets us ignore the night.”

“Less about ignoring the night and more about living with it.” Reya replied as Akeno Projected chairs for everyone. “Thanks.”

“We have some extra at the club but who wants to work hard on such a beautiful night?”

“Shirou certainly will.” It was then the group noticed Tsubasa who was sitting on the ground with her arms on her knees, staring at Caliburn.

“Tsubasa-chan? Something wrong?” Momo moved to sit beside her friend but the lilac haired girl kept staring at the sword.

“It’s just... I feel that I should be here...” The reply concerned everyone who looked at each other hesitantly. “What is about to happen... I need to be here... I never cared about that stupid sword and Kokabiel can rot in hell. Before today I couldn’t be bothered.”

Then she received the message Shirou was going to complete Caliburn and she felt a sudden compulsion to be there. Even as the peerages gathered together and went out to waste time until the scheduled hour her thoughts were completely turned to the sword and who would draw it.

‘If someone is going to draw it.’ Despite not understanding it the thought filled her with wonder and dread.

A moment of silence passed but with so many people around it was bound to last little. “By the way, where is Liz-sensei?” Ise asked as he looked around with confusion. “Wasn’t she with us when we went for dinner?” He clearly remembered her disappointed face while eating the food despite the tower in her plates.

“Shirou called. Needed her help preparing.” Informed Koneko before biting her chocolate bar.

Nobody was surprised that the nekomata eavesdropped on the call even if by accident. “Preparing for what?”

“For anything a sensible magus would when mustering all his resources.” A new voice announced outloud and they turned to see the Church’s delegation composed by Irina, Caren and Kirei. It was the priest towering over the two women who spoke. “For blood.”

A sigh escaped Caren’s lips as she rolled her eyes.. “No need to be dramatic, Father.”

Contrary to the man who was dressed in black, the silver haired woman had a white nurse coat over a gray blouse, a mini skirt definitely not proper for a nun, and pantyhose. She wore

her hair in a style to highlight her face with some dropping on her shoulders while keeping a high ponytail to the left side of her head.

“Dramatic? No, I am not being dramatic in this case. Today there shall be blood. Blood spilled through violence as two sides who couldn’t be any more similar fight for a disagreement of ideals. Such a beauty.” Kirei commented while setting down a box as Irina laughed nervously at his words as the new school nurse rolled her eyes. “In any case.” He opened the container revealing several drinks and foods while also raising a pan and lighting up a fire. “We have a few minutes. Who wants popcorn?”

“What do you know that we don’t?” Sona asked but noticed the abstinence of a particular voice. “Rias...” The redhead was whistling merrily, avoiding looking at her friend’s eyes. “What did you do?”

“Nothing...”

“What did you do?!” She facepalmed, realizing the problem. “Better question; what did Emiya do?”

“Oh my, she started using his family.” Akeno joked only for furious violet eyes to stare at her own. She motioned to zip her own mouth but still smiled playfully

“... Technically Shiro hasn’t done anything yet.” Rias could hear Sona growl.

Everyone could. “Kaichou, please, calm yourself.” Saji tried to pacify her first and all his teammates but Tsubasa moved to help.

Only for Sona to shout in fury. “I want an explanation!” She turned to Kirei. “And you are apparently the only one willing to talk.”

Caren, who had got a thermos and poured some coffee for herself, said, “Carefully with the frown lines. They are going to ruin your face.” The glare turned to her but the silver haired woman was unaffected.

“Can I have some coffee?” Setsuna requested and Irina offered her a cup.

“Don’t worry. The servants of God will-”

“Ow!” “Come on!” “Irina!”

“Oops.” The girl scratched her cheek as the devils complained. “Here is the coffee.”

“... Thank you.” As a hanyou Setsuna wasn’t as affected but still pitted her friends. “More people are arriving.” She added after a twitch of her nose. “There.”

The Daughter of Sesshomaru was pointing East and they all turned to see two figures emerge. From a distance those with better vision could see Altria and Le Fay as they both stepped into the area, moving towards Caliburn.

Those who saw them earlier in the day noticed that the older sister was using a different set of clothes to match her new sword; no longer wearing white as she had replaced her blouse for a zipped up blue jacket and her skirt for a pair of black long shorts.

Her hair was done in a simple ponytail that reached her neck with most of it brushed back to not get in the way of her face saved for some bangs in her forehead. To her left side was Clarent, resting in its sheath and shining with the moon's light, it fully displayed its identity as a Noble Phantasm to anyone present.

"That is almost as strong as Durandal." Irina said it first and Kiba nodded in agreement.

"Yes but that power is more..."

"Refined?" Kirei inquired and everyone turned to him. "Don't be surprised, I was there at its birth."

At that moment Altria approached Caliburn with a frown as her hand rested above the blade. "It isn't reforged yet." Le Fay spouted nervously.

The warrior in blue took a deep breath and turned to her sister. "I know that, Fay. Calm down. I won't lose to a sword." Even if she believed Caliburn would try to take her humanity, Altria was confident and her smile reflected it.

Shaking her head, Le Fay saw that as ignorance. "It can't be that easy." She turned to the side and saw the audience, Gasper and Irina were waving to them. "Should we join the others and wait?"

Altria also noticed them but felt something off. "You can go. I will wait here."

"They have food~" It was hard to ignore the smell as Kirei had really brought everything he needed to make popcorn.

"I am not hungry." If Le Fay was a train that was the moment she tried to break and go off the tracks regardless. She stared at Altria like if the world was coming down on their heads.

"Can you please give this to them?" It was a bag holding the clothes she had borrowed.

"... I am waiting with you..." The magus replied as she took her sister's hand. "Not leaving you alone this time."

"Fay..." Altria felt the love from her sister but remained resolute. "I won't change."

The smaller blonde got ready to reply but bit her lip and turned to the side. "Do whatever you want. It is your life."

Neither sister said anything for the next few minutes and only reacted when three people entered their field of vision. Liz was still in her tracksuit when they arrived but both Shirou

and Xenovia had changed into their combat outfits with the Mage using a different variation of his usual attire.

His red shroud was larger and fashioned in a baggy coat that danced with his every step despite being closed up to his mouth and completely covering his neck. Not only that but Altria managed to observe his form looked bulkier than before even if unequal. Clearly he was hiding something.

All three carried huge bags with the objects that clinked with each other with every step. Neither blonde could really feel anything from it as their senses were focused on the Mage's body as mana seemed to be pouring from him. The magus was the first to take the bag off and he threw it towards his maid who caught it easily.

Only then did anyone notice something in his right hand, smaller than a golf club. "Start setting everything up."

"Yes." "Got it."

The women knew exactly what to do and began moving in a circle around while taking out objects from the bags. Swords of several kinds which were unveiled and stabbed into the ground without discernible pattern. It was all just too random for anyone to understand and their sharp eyes just showed focus, giving nothing away.

None of them felt Caliburn Ruler but Altria knew that sword for most of her life which was why she suspected the object Shirou was holding on. The shape was different and it barely presented any power but there was a spark of familiarity that Altria couldn't shake off.

"What are those for?" Asked the younger Pendragon as she grew tempted to use her magic broom and check things from a bird's eye view. "For the ritual?"

Shirou smiled gently. "It is for after."

"After, hmm." Le Fay smiled at the thought as Altria frowned before hiding her emotions behind a mask.

"Yes, after." The Mage focused on the older sibling. "You have no problems with it, do you?"

Letting out a sigh, Altria held Clarent tightly. "I knew you were going to try something but are you sure you want to do this?"

"Are you sure you want Caliburn? Clarent is a perfectly fine sword."

Looking at her new Noble Phantasm she replied. "You didn't even turn it into a Noble Gear."

"Because I had a feeling we would end up in this exact situation." Confessed the redhead with a shrug that made the smaller blonde smile. "And that you were stubborn."

“Pot calling the kettle black.” Altria couldn’t help but say with a challenging grin. “Just so you know, Ruler was holding me back.”

It was a warning and the fairest one he could ever get. “Just so you know, I already have all the information from you practicing with the new Clarent.” His eyes began to glow and the girl’s grin grew sharper. “Thanks for taking time to practice, now I know just how strong you really are.”

“Feh, that won’t be enough. Sister of a magus, remember?” She patted her sister’s head. “And she explained how detailed your Structural Analysis can be.” Her grin could be easily called cocky. “But there is plenty you can’t do, Reality Marble or not.” She whispered the last part.

“Then we are on equal footing. Good.” Neither would have it any other way. “By the way, you may want to step aside.” The Pendragon sisters looked confused as Liz approached.

“Done.” Said the maid with two empty bags.

From a distance, Xenovia exclaimed while waving her hand, “Master, we are done!”

“Thanks! You can join the others if you want.” He managed to say as his knight approached with a jog.

“Are you sure you won’t want some help?” The bluehead asked while staring into Altria’s eyes.

“No, I got this.”

At the Mage’s response, Altria could only say, “It is only fair.”

“And the only way you will listen.”

“True enough.” Both chuckled as she began to walk away. “You still have Caliburn to reforge. Are you really up to it?”

“Just my second time doing this and now I don’t have a homicidal fallen angel threatening to kill everyone. Waaaaaay easier.” With that she and Le Fay left the area as Xenovia and Liz took their place. “Wait with the others. This could get ugly.”

“It won’t.” Surprisingly it was Liz who said it. “She is like you.”

An eyebrow jumped to Shirou’s forehead. “Really? How so?”

Xenovia folded her arms and replied. “Not the type to take things too far without reason.”

“Funny, today is the day I will take things too far.” He commented while unfolding the blade he was holding.

Caliburn Ruler no longer resembled a real sword but almost a toy dagger of some kind with ridiculous proportions and way too heavy to be practical. Sure the three and everyone else in the area could tell it was powerful but it also felt more malleable. If a Noble Phantasm was a Crystalized Legend fixed in the World, Caliburn Ruler felt like a passing existence..

The weapon was no longer a weapon but a container for its Core that Shirou would transfer to the main sword. "Today I keep my promise." He felt his circuits warm up but didn't act. "You really should step back as well. This could go really, really, really wrong."

"Then this is where we should be." Xenovia replied, Liz nodding her head in agreement. "If worse comes to worse," Durandal made its way to her hand, "I can hold back the explosion."

"Hehehe, well, that shouldn't happen." Turning to Caliburn fully the redhead felt the blade in his hand lose its solid form.

It became liquid gold in Shirou's hands and he dropped to a knee before Caliburn as he felt their powers interacting with each other. The power in his hand was truly similar to the other parts of Caliburn but also there was some sort of difference he couldn't grasp due to their Divine Origin.

'First I need to remove the temporary fragment I placed in the Core. It was always a stop gap anyway.' Free hand resting on the blade, Emiya broke his creation apart little by little as he felt the final Core move into place. 'Huh, this is easier than I thought.'

In his mind he saw Caliburn's complete structure as his Reality Marble processed the Noble Phantasm's actualized form. While his understanding of the weapon was still unparalleled the Cores were like dazzling lights capable of blinding his vision. He could recognize the seven of them but knew little about how they functioned.

But the moment the final Fragment stopped existing and the Core slotted itself into place an odd event occurred inside the Caliburn; they formed a circle and began to dance.

'Is that... an engine?' Shirou couldn't help but compare as he watched transfixed as the seven lights moved around each other in a harmonious circle and made waves.

They moved around the Ether in several ways that could be described as jumps and runs but never broke their perfect formation. With them like so he could finally see how each of them was different. Such knowledge explained why the Church never managed to make two Fragments equal to each other.

Their smiths had no choice, every Core was individually unique and each of them danced to their own tune that still managed to perfectly synchronize with the others. A beautiful chorus played on Shirou's head of which could only be called Divine. He was grasping it, grasping for it, feeling how they belonged not in a sword but-

**Knowledge without equal, understanding of everything, wisdom beyond the wildest dreams of man and monster. Truths lost to time there just waiting to be taken-**

“Shirou?” Liz’s voice brought him back to reality and the redhead blinked in confusion. “Are you alright?” Her hand felt heavy in his shoulder but the magus just stood up calmly, staring at his now empty hand.

“Fine, I guess.” His Reality Marble had touched something and inside the Unlimited Blade Works he could see Caliburn in its true glory.

Much like he could in front of him as even if the appearance hadn’t everyone could feel a change in the air. It was cleared of any pollution or impurity that could have ever existed as the sword banished anything that could be considered harmful.

For a second the devils and the hanyou feared for their existence but it passed with Rias noticing. “We are fine...” Closing her eyes she stood up and took a deep breath. “He didn’t hate us, did He?”

“Father threw away all His rage a long time ago.” Azazel revealed solemnly. “So long as you don’t harm anyone innocent, Caliburn will never turn against you. On the other hand, if anyone here had a corrupt heart-”

“Not even that, Lord Azazel.” Kirei chuckled as he munched some popcorn. “Because I feel absolutely nothing.”

“But Father Kotomine, you are an example of Faith. Why would you be affected?” Irina asked with a goofy grin as she felt serenity unlike never before and she even ignored Caren’s look of disbelief.

She was the only one feeling like that which Ise noticed. “Hey, Irina. You okay?”

“Why Ise, I feel fantastic. It’s almost like I’m lying in a cloud. But you can’t lie in the clouds, hahahaha.”

“Okay?” He turned to the others who looked as confused as he with the exception of Kirei, Caren and Azazel.

Back with Caliburn the trio closest to it kept staring at the sword. “So... is that it?” Xenovia asked with confusion as Durandal shrunk again.

“Pretty much. Why?”

“Well, I was kinda expecting a big boom or a pillar of light like the first one... it was kind of underwhelming.” Both could hear the bluehead’s disappointment as she crouched in front of Caliburn.

“Because it was good.” Liz observed easily. “Just as planned.”

Shirou chuckled at his maid’s observation. “Yep. Things are way easier when everything goes to plan. No explosions, no pillars of light, nothing unexpected.” He began to brush Xenovia’s hair with his fingers. “Underwhelming can be good, sometimes, even if not as fun.”



“Buh.” Still disappointed, the former Exorcist still threw a prayer even as Caliburn’s presence grew more subdued. “So now it is just waiting for someone, isn’t it?”

“Pretty much.”

“Shirou.” Liz’s call had him turning as Altria approached with a confident stride with a more hesitant Le Fay right behind.

“Please, step aside. I came to claim the sword!” The swordswoman proclaimed out loud for all to hear.

“Know that if you do it, there will be no turning back!” The Mage shouted just as loudly. “If you claim this blade... then you will no longer be human. Do you understand what that implies?”

“Yes, I came to take this sword because I so desire.” Xenovia, Liz and Le Fay began to move aside leaving the two warriors standing before each other with Caliburn in her line of sight.

“I don’t think you understand what it means to lose one’s Humanity.” Pointed out the redhead with a frown.

Then Altria surprised him with her answer. “Even if Caliburn really tries to take it, I won’t lose to a sword.” Fire burned in her eyes and heart for Shirou to see. “And someone needs to take it. For far too long the World stood divided, for far too long evil has run rampant. Someone needs to put an end to it.” With a step forward the wind shifted as the atmosphere welcomed her resolve. “I will make everything right and build a future without wars.”

“Do you really think you can do it?” Shirou scoffed at the notion. “You don’t sound that different from Hero Faction.”

Instead of retreating she took another step forward. “But humans aren’t the only ones who need to be protected. Everyone capable of sympathy, courage and kindness deserves a chance to see that future.” Another step forward had mana around the area bowing to her as Caliburn resonated with her spirit. Just recently reforged, the blade could show to all who it was waiting for. “All they need is someone who can pave the way.”

“And what happens when you fail?”

“I won’t fail.”

“What happens when you are gone?”

“Then I won’t leave.” With Caliburn it was possible, time would lose its meaning and she could watch over the peace for eternity.

But Shirou saw it differently. “All capable of good are also capable of evil, a Saviour won’t change that. You will be fighting wars forever.”

"I am ready." Altria's answer was definitive.

The magus couldn't help but laugh so hard he almost bent over his knees, surprising everyone. It was a laugh devoid of joy like he was laughing over the worst but most ironic joke on the planet. It was so loud, so sudden everyone and everything stopped to watch as he placed a hand over his face and kept laughing.

Memories, his own and not, played in his mind as a conversation with his father came to mind first before he moved on for memories where a girl looking exactly like Altria said similar words and did similar actions.

Looking to the sky he watched the stars with only an eye exposed, thinking about all Altria said. 'I have no doubt now, she is Artoria Pendragon. A new life but the same mistakes.' He chuckled bitterly as Caliburn's memories came next. "That sword will break in your hands again. You are going to fail."

He stated bluntly but Altria was barely affected. "No, I will succeed. Even if it takes me a thousand years, a billion years, I will stand firm."

"It is easy to say without understanding and perhaps the best way to do so is by walking that path." Taking a deep breath, Shirou looked at her with eyes full of pity and sadness. "It is funny, you see, that I made promises to watch over this sword, to reforge it, and even to guide the person who can draw it to them." He paused as her eyes were locked on him and she felt the weight of his emotions. "The Order of Pendragon... Ever heard of it? They wanted Caliburn reforged more than anyone and a King to follow more than anything."

"If they-"

"I made promises." But the magus wasn't done, far from it. "I swore that Caliburn would be restored. Conveniently someone worthy of it was the one who made it possible. I should be calling them with the good news." Gently he motioned to her almost as if to present her to the world. Altria saw some bitter joy there as his smile grew forced. "They gave me a name fashioned in their traditions, the name of the court wizard, Merlin the Mage of Swords. God, I hate that name..." All amusement had vanished as he admitted to all where his title came from. "And now I find myself in the same place as the Mage of Flowers, facing the very same decision. Should I move out of the way and let you pursue a Fate which can only end in misery?" For the first time she believed it, believed that was the only possible result of taking Caliburn. "No, I am not Merlin and I don't give a damn about promises that will steal someone's happiness forever!"

With a shift of his footing Altria saw the attack coming and placed Clarent, still in its sheath, in his path as Shirou opened his coat and drew a Muramasa from within. Before they made contact the blonde noticed how slow the blow was. It was still tremendously strong so it shoved her several meters away but she understood that her defense was premeditated.

Shirou knew exactly how she would react to his attack, using the surprise and brute force to make sure she would not only defend in a certain way it would be done so in such a manner that she couldn't react with Clarent on time.

Once she controlled her momentum Altria drew her sword and threw her sheet aside while grasping it with her two hands. "I knew we were going to fight but until today I didn't expect it would be so soon."

"The church?" Shirou moved little trying to hide what else he had on his coat but Altria saw a glimmer of steel.

Swords, several Muramasas which he forged over the years, were tied with his shroud in an impossible fashion that was only feasible thanks to Medusa's Gift and its ability to facilitate his Alterations.

Thanks to that it wasn't farfetched to say that besides his usual armor Shirou also was wearing a shell of swords around his body.

"Yes. It was then I knew you would try to stop me." Altria acknowledged while strengthening her posture as mana flared up around her. "You even set up the battlefield so I hope there are no complaints when you lose."

Several kinds of swords surrounded Altria from all sides with several distances between each of them. Adding that to the swords in his person and the magic he possessed Shirou had made an environment pretty similar to his Reality Marble. Indeed he had prepared everything with the goal of defeating in a one on one match.

"So be it." A swing of the Muramasa in his hands had all blades in the area shaking with the exception of one. Caliburn wasn't his creation and even if it could show gratitude it would fight against his goal. "If you want that sword you will have to go through me!"

Both sides charged and their clash sent an echo all Kuoh was able to hear.

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