

[Adam C. POV.]

The three months leading up to the exam passed in the blink of an eye.

Preparations, training, and other things taking most of my time.

And it was for the best, the last thing I needed right now was being alone with my thoughts.

That never ends well.

That being said, the day for the Trials had finally arrived, meaning things were about to change, and to end, for better or for worse.

Right now, I was working on some last-minute paperwork in the old man's office, letting the minutes go by as I waited for the time to leave for Tenrou Island.

"Adam, are you ready?" Makarov asked as he walked into the room, an excited expression on his face, probably due to the occasion.

"Almost," I replied, putting the finishing touches on the documents in front of me. "Just a few more signatures and I'll be good to go."

It was surprisingly shocking how simplistic Fiore's Laws were, it almost made me want to get my law degree again, maybe if I had more time.

Makarov nodded, his eyes scanning the papers before him. "Good, good. You sure you don't want to be the next master?"

I chuckled at the thought. "Not in a million years, Gramps, I think I'll stick to being a simple mage for now."

As I signed the last document, I couldn't help but feel nervous. This was it, the moment I had been preparing for, for years, was finally coming. The moment that would decide the fate of the world.

I sighed.

Perhaps it was best not to think too much about it.

"Are you alright, son?" Makarov asked, noticing my sudden change in mood.

I nodded, forcing a smile. "Yeah, just a bit tired from all this work, you know how it is."

He patted my shoulder reassuringly. "I do indeed, why do you think I look this old?!"

...

Because you're old?

I chuckled half-heartedly at the joke. It was a much-needed distraction from the weight of the upcoming events. "Don't worry, Gramps. You still look great for being only three hundred years old."

Makarov gasped dramatically, clutching his heart. "Three hundred?! I'll have you know I'm only eighty-eight!"

I couldn't help but laugh at his reaction. "My mistake, Gramps. I guess that means, you still have plenty of years left to boss me around."

Makarov grinned at my comment, nodding proudly, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "You bet I do, brat. Now, let's go! Before I cancel the trials, Natsu is driving me... insane."

One by one, everyone boarded the ship that would take us to Tenrou Island, each step feeling heavier than the last.

Having settled on the ship, I took a deep breath, allowing the salty sea air to fill my lungs, a harsh yet invigorating reminder of the journey ahead of me.

Acnologia.

Zeref.

I chuckled.

As the ship began to move, Magnolia's coastline started to blur, becoming a distant sight, a speck in the massive sea around us.

Makarov, Gildarts, and I sat together, engaging in random conversations about the trials, double-checking our plans, and reassuring each other that we had made the right choice letting Natsu take the exams.

This was nice.

As... difficult as my choice was, I was happy with everything.

As the hours slipped by, I found myself at the ship's bow, watching the hypnotic dance of the waves. The sea, vast and relentless, was a silent companion, slowly carrying me toward my fate.

It was calming.

In a way at least.

Gildarts joined me, his expression serious. "Everything good son?" he asked, his gaze fixed on the horizon.

I wanted to tell him.

I wanted to... more than anything, but as much as I wanted to do so, what good would it do?

They would only try to stop me, in a fruitless attempt to save me.

I couldn't blame them though, I had taken this choice for the same reason they would try to stop me, to protect them.

I would protect them.

No matter what, I would.

That much, I vowed.

"Everything's good, why?" I replied, tilting my head.

Gildarts gave me a long look, his eyes filled with concern, before he turned his gaze back to the sea. "No reason. Just wanted to make sure you were okay. We're all in this together, you know."

It was almost as if he knew.

I smiled at the thought. "Would you die for the sake of others?"

Gildarts raised his eyebrow at my question, his expression thoughtful. "Depends on the person," he replied slowly.

"But for you guys? Yeah, I would. I would give my life for everyone in the Guild, without hesitation."

"Don't let Cana hear that," I chuckled.

Gildarts remained silent. "Why the question?"

I hummed. "No reason, just felt like asking that."

Gildarts nodded, still looking out at the sea. "Well, I'll tell you this much. I don't know what you're going through right now but know that you're not alone in this. We're all here for you. Whatever you need, we've got your back."

I felt a lump forming in my throat at his words. These people, my family.

If there was an afterlife in this world, I would miss them.

"Don't worry," I replied, slapping him in the back.

"Well, if you need me, I will be drinking with the old man," Gildarts chuckled and walked away, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, facing the sea, its surface reflecting the brilliant hues of twilight.

And as the wind tousled my hair, I thought about what Gildarts had said. He was right; I wasn't alone. Which is exactly why I was able to do this, without second thoughts.

To love, is to give your life away for the sake of others. I wasn't doing anything they themselves wouldn't do for me, or for the others.

Perhaps I was being a bit more selfish than them... who knows...

Either way, selfish or not, Acnologia will meet my blade.