

Interlude TN: Ensou

Tohsaka Nagato was a lot of things, but the one thing he certainly wasn't was a fool.

Some might have said so, for he did not notice immediately that something was wrong, but no honest man could truly blame him for having missed the initial signs. After all, his acquaintance with the man known only to him as "Zelretch" was truly not much more than that, because he had not been lying when he said the teachings imparted unto him were often simply assignments in self-study.

There were any number of reasons, therefore, why this man could have been late to their meeting. It would not even be the first where he had not shown himself at all, and only sometimes were those lessons in and of themselves about how to detect the presence of a magus in an area where he appeared not to be.

It was annoying to come all the way to London, of course, only to find it would be one of those lessons. It had been from the start. Nagato was simply unable to do anything about it. Who would he complain to? Someone else in the Association? When they weren't looking at him as though he was a particularly foul piece of scum scraped off of the bottom of someone's shoe, they whispered to each other about how long it would take him to break.

He had even heard several of them make bets on the subject, as though his apparently inevitable suffering was some kind of sport to spectate.

How crass. The least they could have done was wait until he was out of earshot to say such things, but he suspected that their saying them where and when he could hear was a part of their mocking. What a farce. An institution purportedly dedicated to preservation and furtherance of the study of magecraft, and they played petty politics and dealt in flagrant stereotypes.

How learned these magi truly were.

Nothing had seemed unusual, therefore, when Zelretch did not appear, even after some hours of waiting. Nagato had simply accepted it as it was and left to return to his apartment — not a moment too soon, it seemed, because as he found out only later, the Association's headquarters had been assaulted.

Whether the lower levels and their occupants remained alive and unharmed, Nagato could not say, and frankly, he couldn't even have said why he cared that much. It wasn't like many — if any at all — would thank him for his assistance, even if he happened to save their lives. For that matter, they would surely be better off extracting themselves, if he was so inferior to the lot of them.

Perhaps it was just a matter of common decency. Nagato was no saint, but even he could be compelled to do the right thing simply because it was the right thing to do.

He knew it would be the height of stupidity to attempt an investigation of his own, however. He was an amateur at best — there was no shame for him in admitting that his daughter was the one who overflowed with talent for the mystic arts — and any being that could catch the Association and its Enforcers off guard was far beyond him. The only thing sticking his nose in where it didn't belong would accomplish was seeing it lopped off.

He liked both his head and his nose precisely where they were, thank you very much.

With the benefit of hindsight, this attack was not the first sign, but it *was* the most obvious. Something was amiss in London, something dangerous and deadly and something which Nagato very clearly should not interfere in.

If he had been uncertain before, however, then the mist, of course, dispelled all doubt. He hadn't even made it out the door of his rented room before he realized how dangerous it would be to step out into the fog that rolled in over the city, blanketing everything beneath its insidious touch. The thick magical energy inside of it had nearly burned the fine hairs off of the backs of his hands.

Even an amateur like him could feel that much.

The unfortunate reality, however, was that this self-same mist made it impossible to leave the city. It choked commerce, including any form of transportation, and Nagato would not be surprised if all of the horses had died within the first few hours. Leaving the city within the timeframe of the scant four hours afforded to the citizenry every morning was simply nonviable — a fact made all the clearer when the next morning's paper reported that contact had been lost with the government outside of London.

It seemed that whatever was behind these things did not want anyone — not even Nagato — to leave. Why? It was impossible to say, only that this particular insistence left him with precious few options. In the end, staying put and waiting for things to resolve themselves wasn't one of them. Much as he didn't want to, he had to get involved more directly.

That was, of course, easier said than done. The fact that he couldn't afford inaction under the circumstances didn't change his own powerlessness to do much of anything. He was one man, a single amateur magus of little note, and while he could defend himself, somehow, he didn't think whoever was behind all of this would be particularly impressed with his skill in the martial arts.

In that sense, Nursery Rhyme was a godsend. If he hadn't stumbled across her wandering aimlessly through the streets, then he might have spent weeks trying to find clues about what exactly was going on. Doubly so, since a few hours later, she led him to a group of strangers in strange clothing who seemed to have a much better grasp of what was going on than he did.

Tohsaka Nagato was many things, but he was not a fool.

“— wild that he survived it,” said the redhead, the girl calling herself Rika. “Fou's been through some pretty crazy stuff with us, but he just took a Noble Phantasm to the face and walked it off a few minutes later!”

“Th-that *was* scary,” the girl in dark armor, Mash, said. She was petting the little creature riding her shoulder like it was her lifelong companion. “I thought Fou had really been hurt that time, but...maybe Jack's Noble Phantasm just didn't work that well on him?”

The last part, she addressed to the blue-eyed boy, Ritsuka, who could only shake his head. “Sorry, Mash, but I can't remember any details about that either. Everything about Jack the Ripper is gone.”

“It would make sense, if you think about it,” the tan-skinned Emiya added. “After all, the legend of Jack the Ripper is all about his *female* victims. It would be completely in line with that if his Noble Phantasm was only truly effective against women.”

“That’s why you get to fight him, next time!” Rika chirped. Emiya only sighed.

“Me and my big mouth...”

“Scared?” Mordred mocked, grinning. “Don’t worry, Emiya, I’ll protect you from the big, bad serial killer! Just you watch, next time, I’ll cut ‘em right in half!”

“I feel safer already,” Emiya replied dryly.

...Although he might have to wind up revising that later. It remained to be seen whether these Chaldea folk were truly that remarkable. To look at them, they seemed like a ragtag group without much of a clue, but they had at least managed to hold off the Jabberwocky long enough to force his surrender, so perhaps there was something to them after all.

“I’m not sure when we can expect to see him again,” said the dark-haired Arash. If the Chaldean Masters looked out of place because their clothing was too finely woven and too perfectly crafted to exist in the current era or in Nagato’s native era, then the likes of Arash and Mordred stood out for the opposite reason.

Honestly, they looked a little silly, walking about the streets of London like that. That was why Nagato was trying to keep a little bit of distance from them, as though he could convince anyone who might be peeping through their shutters that he wasn’t associated with them in any way.

“He doesn’t seem to like a fight where he has any chance of actually losing,” Arash went on. “After his Noble Phantasm failed and Mash came to back me up, he ran away instead of staying to fight.”

“Not so surprising,” said the boy with the unusually deep voice, Andersen. Another Servant, although his presence was so weak it was virtually nonexistent. “Were you expecting an Assassin, who specializes in surprise attacks and underhanded tactics, to jump at the chance to fight two Knight class Servants? Don’t be absurd.”

“That’s a good point, too,” Arash agreed.

“He’s an ambush predator,” the mysterious Taylor added. “Don’t expect honor duels or fair fights. You’re right, Arash. If and when he shows up again, it’ll only be when he’s absolutely sure he can get the kill without dying himself. Although...”

Her head didn’t turn and she didn’t look anywhere except ahead, but a chill went down Nagato’s spine and he got the distinct impression that her attention had turned towards him and his Servant. Like a great serpent eyeing a mouse and deciding whether or not it was hungry enough to chase it.

“Although?” Ritsuka asked curiously.

“Do you have a plan, Senpai?” asked Rika.

“No, it’s nothing,” Taylor said. Like a cloud passing in front of the sun, Nagato sensed her attention shift away. “We might be able to set up an ambush of our own to catch Jack, but the last place we want to do something like that is anywhere near the apartment.”

“Right,” said Arash. “He might try going after Jekyll and the others if he feels cornered. And if he escapes from that, we’ll have led him right to our main base in the city. The enemy would know exactly where to find us.”

“Assuming they don’t already,” Taylor said. “But for now, since we can’t know for sure, let’s assume they don’t. It’s best to — patrol squad up ahead.”

She shifted so suddenly that it almost caught Nagato off guard. In one instant, mid-sentence, her voice became hard and cold, clinical. The great serpent coiling tightly without warning.

“Their numbers?” asked Ritsuka.

“Four each, just like last time,” Taylor rattled off. “Automata, Helter Skelter, and homunculi.” She checked the metal band around her wrist. “We have enough time to deal with them.”

Ritsuka and Rika both nodded. “Then let’s,” said the boy.

“I wanna see what Mash’s power up looks like!” the girl added with a savage grin.

“I won’t disappoint!” Mash promised.

“Patrol squad?” asked Nagato.

The cloud moved. The sun shone briefly upon Nagato again, Taylor’s attention turning once more his way. It was unsettling that she could do it without once actually looking in his direction.

“The masterminds behind this Singularity have taken to sending out squads to patrol the city and distract anyone who might try to stop them,” she answered. “Two types of mechanical...golems, I guess you could call them, and a type of mass-produced homunculus. They’re no match for Servants, but if these guys are halfway competent, then they’re keeping track of where each group patrols and using it to monitor our own movements.”

“They really don’t look like proper homunculi,” said Emiya as though he felt compelled to defend what a proper homunculus should be. “Or act much like one either.”

“I see,” said Nagato, although he really didn’t. Vaguely, he understood the concept of what a homunculus was, but he was fairly sure he’d never seen one before, and he certainly had never once encountered a mechanical golem.

And yet, they were being constructed and ordered about by the masterminds behind this twisted place? Nagato had always known that Servants were incredible, but to think they could dream up such things and bring them to life so easily was startling.

As though he hadn’t already known that he was in far over his head. His own Servant had conjured fantastical creatures from nothing, after all, and it didn’t seem as though that pattern was going to stop anytime soon.

Better to be involved and seeing this whole thing resolved faster than sitting about doing nothing, however. Waiting around for someone else to fix things and save him felt just a little bit too...inelegant.

Minutes later, the creatures they had been talking about appeared on the street, but they were heard far sooner, from the delicate clinking of the puppet-like automata to the lumbering thuds of the Helter Skelter. The meaty thump of the grotesque homunculi was nearly silent by comparison.

“What the hell are those?” Nagato demanded.

But if the creatures hadn’t noticed their group before, then his shocked shout was enough to draw their attention, and the assembled collection of monstrosities turned fully towards them with menacing intent.

Great. If there had ever been the chance of a surprise attack, then his reaction had ruined it entirely. Damn it, Nagato, why were you such a screw-up?

“Couldn’t you have held that in?” Andersen lamented.

“This is just what I needed!” Mordred cackled as she kicked off and raced down the road. “A bunch of shit I don’t have to worry about breaking!”

Emiya and Mash followed her lead, but Arash hung back with the rest of the team and fired arrows from his bow instead. Nagato half-expected Taylor to lunge into the fray and start hacking away at something with that little knife of hers, but she stayed back as well instead.

“We’re not sure who’s making them,” Ritsuka admitted as though a fight wasn’t happening nearby. His eyes, however, remained firmly on the action. “Just that the enemy masterminds, P, B, and M, are the ones responsible for them being out here, and those three are probably Servants, too.”

“P, B, and M?” More nonsense from the future?

“The initials of the enemy masterminds,” Taylor clarified for him, “according to one of the native collaborators here. Unfortunately, he didn’t do us the courtesy of spelling out their names, so we don’t know who exactly they actually are.”

“I-I see. And you didn’t ask him to tell you more about them?”

“Kinda hard to do that, seeing as he’s dead,” said Rika flippantly. “Go, Mash! Smash ‘em to pieces!”

And further down the road, Mash and the others were doing exactly that. Mordred was bashing around the thick, mechanical monstrosities with heavy strikes that dented the metal, and Emiya and Mash focused on the sleeker, more fragile automata, which were breaking much more easily under repeated abuse. The bulky homunculi, being apparently made of softer flesh, went down from precision strikes by Arash’s arrows, and the man himself fired so quickly that Nagato honestly couldn’t see individual draws.

It was another side of Servants that Nursery Rhyme hadn’t shown him. Somehow, he couldn’t picture her doing anything at all like the others, because the idea of her jumping in and throwing punches against those things seemed frankly comical.

Something wrong, Papa? an intrusive voice asked inside his own head.

Nagato did his best to keep his face schooled and his discomfort buried. *It’s nothing.*

How did he explain that he felt out of his depth more than he ever had before? Zelretch had opened up his world to a whole new realm of possibilities, giving Nagato and the Tohsaka a new path to explore towards the future. Martial arts? Magecraft? Why not both? He had been shown things he could only have dreamed about before, and especially in the early days, it had felt like too much.

Now, yet more things had appeared to confuse him. Servants, Singularities, Holy Grails. Demon Gods and devastated futures. The world had grown only larger in the last few days, in the last few *hours*, and yet it had shrunk in equal measure. Never before had he seemed smaller than he felt now.

In that regard, he might actually be thankful that this would all disappear from his memory once it was over, but...

Yes. But.

All too quickly, the fight was over, and the Servants returned to the rest of the group. Mordred had a relaxed, satisfied air about her, like smashing the enemy creatures to bits had served to temper her mood, and even Mash seemed pleased with herself.

“Good job, Mash,” said Ritsuka.

“Thank you, Senpai!” Mash replied. “It really did feel a lot easier than it was last time!”

“What’d I tell ya?” Mordred crowed. “See, now that you’re acting like a proper Servant, you’re actually starting to fight like one!”

“I guess Mo-chan really did know what she was doing!” Rika said.

Mordred laughed. “I guess so, huh? Never done something like that before, but my instincts are top notch! Only makes sense it worked, don’t it?”

Taylor’s brow furrowed. “You’ve...never done anything like that before?”

“Nah! You kidding?” Mordred shook her head, ponytail flapping. “Me, a teacher? Like hell I’m gonna sign myself up for something like that! ‘S not in my, whatchamacallit, temperament.”

“One need only spend a few minutes with you to realize that,” Andersen said. Mordred made a rude gesture in his direction.

“Even so,” said Mash. “Although the method might have been somewhat, um, q-questionable, you still helped me, Sir Mordred. I’m grateful.”

Mordred grunted. “Ugh. Geez. Don’t mention it, okay? You’re making it weird now.”

Mash bowed her head to hide the smile on her lips. “Of course. Sorry.”

Even Nagato could tell it lacked sincerity.

As the group moved on and came upon the remains of the things, Nagato paused long enough to toe the pieces of one of the destroyed machines. As expected, he couldn’t make anything of it, neither the method of its construction nor the means by which it achieved locomotion. Whatever it

was, it was far in advance of his era, and on his own, he wouldn't have had a hope of figuring out its origin or its maker.

The less that was said about the automata, the better. For all that it was "simpler" than the Helter Skelter, it seemed even more mystical and inexplicable. At least the Helter Skelter's internal mechanisms hinted at how it might manage to walk about, even if the particulars eluded him. The automata seemed moved entirely by some outside force, and so they were most likely built by some magus of one stripe or another.

The homunculi made the least sense. They were humanoid, but their structure was completely alien. No mouth, no apparent eyes or olfactory organs, no primary or secondary sex characteristics... It was almost like the creator had taken the silhouette of a man and filled it in with strips of some organic compound. The only other thing about it that seemed human was the red blood leaking from its wounds.

"There are more of these things?" Nagato asked.

"We encountered them before on our way to Soho," answered Taylor. "Beyond that..." She looked towards Mordred. "Sir Mordred?"

"Yeah, these things are all over the place," Mordred confirmed. "I've spent most of the last couple days thinning out their numbers, but it seems like whoever's making 'em just keeps making more. Dunno what else he might be using 'em for, though. It ain't like I've found them building something or anything like that."

"Maybe they really are only meant to be a distraction," Taylor theorized.

"What from is still the question we don't have an answer to," Arash added. "Still. At least they aren't all that hard to beat. If they were a match for us Servants, then I'd say we were really in trouble."

"Does that mean I can play next time, too?" asked Nursery Rhyme. She looked to Nagato for permission. "Can I, Papa?"

If only she didn't look so much like his daughter, it would have been easier to treat her like a tool to be used. Instead, every time she spoke and looked at him, he was reminded of another little girl who was waiting for him to return home, and the only way to order her about firmly was to make sure he couldn't see her face. His only saving grace was that she wasn't using his daughter's name, too.

"As long as you don't overdo it. You need to make sure you have the energy, just in case Jackie comes back."

"Hmm," Nursery Rhyme hummed thoughtfully. "Maybe I'll just use some Trump Soldiers, then. That ought to be enough for a few weaklings like that."

Taylor's attention turned towards the both of them again, and Nagato pushed down the urge to flinch away from the intensity of it. The woman was something like ten years his junior and surrounded by the superhuman, so how was it that she managed to come off as the most dangerous person in the entire group?

Maybe it was the bugs. Nagato's skin still crawled whenever he remembered the massive swarm that she had commanded and the threat of what she would use it for if Nursery Rhyme stepped out of line.

And yet, despite how much she unnerved him, she and her group were still his best bet for making it back home. What a tangled mess this whole thing was.

"Maybe we should just let you handle the next group when we find them," Taylor eventually allowed.

"Fine by me," Mordred said flippantly. "I'm feeling pretty relaxed after that last one, so if someone else wants a shot at 'em, I've got no problems letting them take a few swings."

Nursery Rhyme giggled, delighted. "Oh, goodie!"

"It's unnerving, sometimes," Andersen murmured, so quiet that Nagato almost didn't hear him, "just how easily she can act her apparent age, despite the fact she's just a book."

Sometimes, Nagato thought, even he forgot it.

Their group continued on, and never once did they ever approach the river that cut through the middle of the city. Instead, they made a beeline almost perfectly due east as the sun above them inched across the sky, and in the distance, the first beginnings of the familiar fog started to creep in, slinking over the streets and slithering along the stone.

Fortunately, they encountered no more of those strange mechanical monsters or twisted creatures, so Nursery Rhyme didn't get a chance to "play" with any of them, and it wasn't long at all before they came upon an apartment building much like those around it — well ahead of the incoming fog. This one, however, was set apart by the woman standing guard by its front door, although she wasn't exactly 'standing' guard, since she sat, chin propped up on one hand, on the steps leading up to the door.

By the blackened metal armor she wore, just as out of place as Arash and Mordred, she could only be another Servant. Her presence wafted over Nagato like heat from a fire, and if she had combusted right there in front of him, he could not say he would have been surprised.

"Sup," she said as they approached. Her pale yellow eyes raked him over like hot coals, then moved onto Nursery Rhyme, and one eyebrow rose as her upper lip curled. "Who are these two new fuckers?"

"Hey!" Rika said, grinning. "Language, missy! There's a kid present!"

"Yeah?" the woman drawled. "And I give a shit...why, exactly?"

Nursery Rhyme smiled, and she looked up at Nagato, tugging on one of his sleeves. "Papa," she said, all sugar and innocence, "what's a fucker?"

The new woman's face froze, then twisted with something like panic. Rika, who Nagato had since tentatively pinned as a bit of a jokester, rounded on her immediately. "Look at what you've done!"

"H-hey, I didn't mean to...!" the woman protested.

Mordred, off to the side, burst out into laughter, doubling over and clutching her gut through her armor. Out of the corner of his eye, Nagato saw Emiya hide a smile behind his hand, and even Arash had to look away to try and keep a straight face. Ritsuka chuckled under his breath and Mash giggled quietly.

“A bad word, Alice,” Nagato decided to say. Playing into jokes like that wasn’t really something he liked doing, but if a little prank like this got the more foul-mouthed among them to speak a little more elegantly, it was all to the better. “You absolutely shouldn’t use it, especially in polite company.”

“Okay!” Nursery Rhyme said brightly. “If you say so, Papa!”

It only sent Mordred into another fit of laughter.

“W-whatever,” the new woman said. Faint splotches of red colored her pale cheeks. “S-so just who are these two fu...fudgers, anyway?”

“Tentative allies,” Taylor answered. Her attention turned back Nagato’s way briefly, along with her head, but was gone again just as quickly. “We found them while we were investigating the magical tome for Jekyll’s collaborator.”

The woman’s eyes settled on a point behind him. “And the pipsqueak in the back?”

“The collaborator himself,” was the immediate reply.

“No sh...” Her gaze flickered briefly to Nursery Rhyme. “No sheets?”

“Sheets?” Rika echoed, smile threatening to split her face in half.

“Don’t mind me,” said Andersen. “I merely came along for the ride. It was safer for me than trying to make the trip on my own.”

“Hey, yeah,” said Rika, turning to him. “Why *did* you come back with us, Andy?”

Andersen’s face twisted. Apparently, he didn’t particularly like the nickname she had just saddled him with. Nagato had a hard time feeling sympathy for the man who had suggested he was some kind of sexual deviant simply because the form Nursery Rhyme had taken mimicked his daughter’s.

“If you gave Doctor Jekyll the information in the first place,” Ritsuka murmured thoughtfully, “you must have already had a way of contacting him, after all.”

“Yes, well.” Andersen cleared his throat into his fist. “When I said that the shopkeeper of that bookshop had generously allowed me to stay, I...perhaps might have been exaggerating somewhat.”

“Exaggerating?” Taylor demanded. “Exaggerating, how?”

“He...didn’t even...know I was there,” Andersen admitted reluctantly. “Obviously. How could he, when the magical tome had already put him to sleep? I had to sneak in through the back door.”

“So you were a freeloader,” Rika concluded.

“It’s not like I could stay out on the streets,” Andersen grumbled. “And no matter which apartment I decided to stay in, I would have been intruding, since most of Soho had already been put to sleep. It was unavoidable.”

“Unavoidable, he says,” Mordred said with relish. “You were a pretty cocky little brat to be talking the way you were when you were just a squatter taking advantage of a man who literally couldn’t tell you no.”

Before Andersen could muster a reply, the door to the apartment creaked and swung open, revealing an older gentleman with a full head and beard of silvery hair. He looked down at their assembled group.

“I thought I heard people talking,” the man said in a wizened voice. “It seems your group has returned — with more comrades, to boot. My, but it is quite fortunate that the upper floors are vacant. We’re developing quite the troupe, aren’t we?”

“Abraham,” Taylor greeted him with a nod, and then gave another to the armored woman as she stood from the step, “Jeanne Alter. This is Nagato Tohsaka, a magus who got caught up in this Singularity. The girl is his Servant, Nursery Rhyme, and the boy in the back is another Servant, Hans Christian Andersen.”

“Charmed,” Nagato said politely, and only afterwards realized it could have counted as a pun.

“A magus, huh?” Jeanne Alter regarded him with a devilish grin, and the blazing pyre of her aura grew large enough to engulf him. “He one of those Association bastards we have permission to shish kebab?”

Nagato took a step back. Sweat began to bead at his temples.

“Oh!” Nursery Rhyme smiled brightly and clasped her hands together. “Are we going to play again? Jabberwocky might make a teensy-tiny little mess if we’re doing it right here, though!”

“Dear me!” muttered Abraham.

“No,” said Ritsuka firmly. “They’re our allies now. Director Marie has officially licensed him as a temporary Master of Chaldea.”

The woman called Jeanne Alter sneered. “That so?”

“Yes,” Taylor confirmed. “The Director decided that having another Master on hand — even a temporary one — would help to bolster our forces and make solving this Singularity easier. I won’t tell you to treat him like you would one of us, since he doesn’t hold your contract, but he’s our ally now.”

An instant later, the flames of Jeanne Alter’s presence banked, and she turned away, apparently disinterested.

“Whatever. Now that you guys are back, my shift’s over, right?”

“Right,” Taylor agreed. She looked meaningfully up the street, towards where the mist was beginning to gather in the distance. “We should get back inside. We can explain the rest of what happened to Jekyll at the same time.” She turned briefly to her own Servant. “Arash?”

“I’ll keep an eye on things out here,” Arash promised. Taylor nodded.

“Thank you.”

“In the meantime,” said the man called Abraham, clapping his hands together, “Renée should be finished preparing lunch shortly. I imagine you all must be famished.” He slid a look towards Nagato. “And there is no better way to greet a new friend than to offer him a well-cooked meal, is there?”

Rika grimaced. “Ugh. On the one hand, that lady really is a good cook. On the other hand, my loyalty to my house-husband should be absolute, and I feel like I’m betraying him!”

“Senpai,” Mash breathed as a sigh.

“Rika is complaining about good food,” Ritsuka said with a smile, “the world really must have ended.”

Rika squinted at him. “See, I can’t tell if you’re making a joke or not, because the world actually ended and that’s why we’re in this whole mess to begin with.”

“I hate to admit it, but my own feelings on the issue are somewhat complicated,” said Emiya. “Quite frankly, it should be a bit of a relief not to have my talents reduced to the quality of my cooking, but... Perhaps I’ve simply gotten used to the idea of that particular responsibility being mine.”

“My apologies,” said Abraham as he stepped back to allow them entrance. “But as the closest thing she has to a father, I’m sure you’ll forgive me for siding with Renée on the issue of cooking.”

“Naturally,” Emiya agreed.

The group meandered into the apartment, with the exception of Arash, who, in a feat of superhuman strength and athleticism, leapt up onto the roof of the building to stand guard. Nagato and Nursery Rhyme were the last to enter, and she looked up at him as the seconds dragged on.

“Papa?”

Nagato’s lips drew tight. “It’s nothing.”

And he entered the apartment. The door clicked as it shut behind him, a note of finality, as though to cut off any possibility of going back on his decision to team up with these people.

In the end, there wasn’t any other choice. Perhaps, just perhaps, it would have been possible for him and Nursery Rhyme to come out of that fight the victors, if only he had kept his cool and remained in harmony with his world instead of losing his patience. What it would have meant for him and the rest of the world, however, well, that was a bit of a trickier question. If the whole explanation they had given him was completely correct, then he would have doomed all of humanity, including his daughter.

The only way he could have avoided that inevitable result was by taking the Grail for himself and making his own wish. If the original deviation was undone in such a manner, wouldn't the Singularity be solved that way just as well? Perhaps. There was no way to be sure, was there? It was all conjecture. Theory. He could just as well make things worse.

Tohsaka Nagato was many things, but he was not a fool. If he could not win this Holy Grail War by defeating an alliance of several Masters supporting several Servants, then it seemed only natural to him that he should join them and help them to accomplish their goal of securing the Grail and correcting this twisted world.

And at the end of it all, when the day was saved and the enemies defeated, when the opportune moment arose, when the Grail was in front of him and ripe for the taking, perhaps...

Yes. Perhaps.