

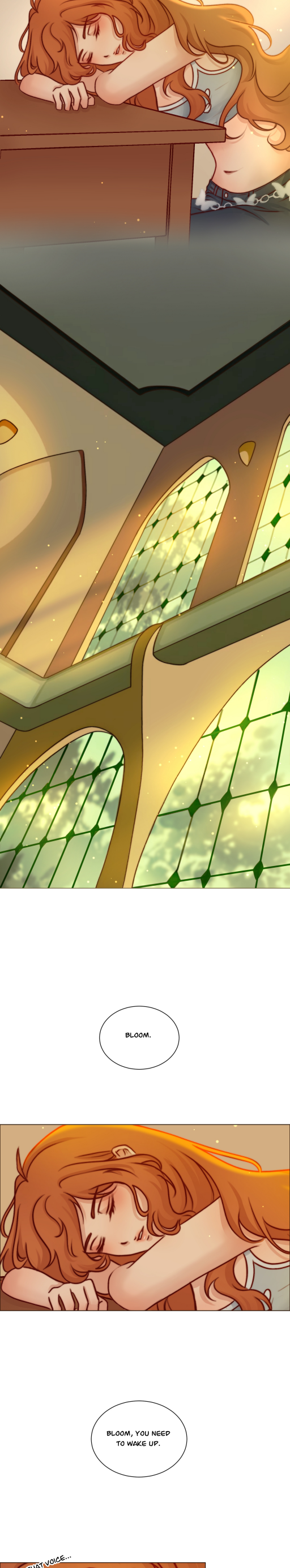
Embers to Inferno

By Shiroyuki

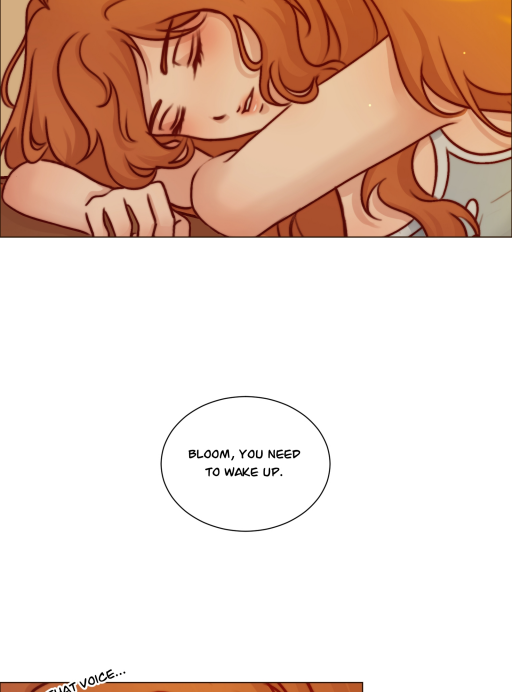
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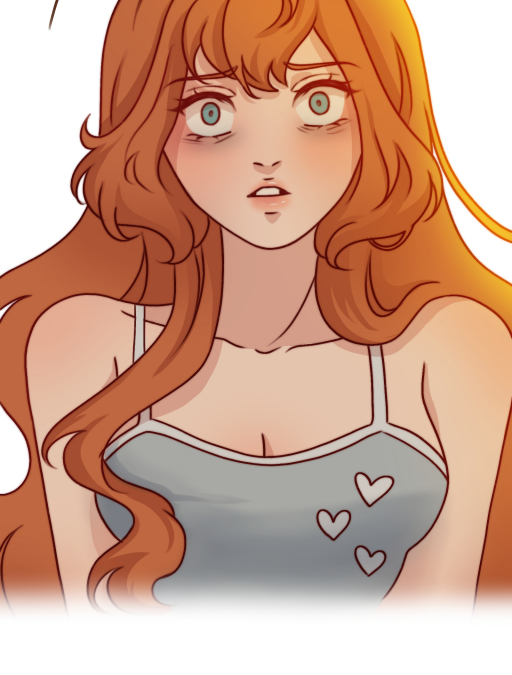
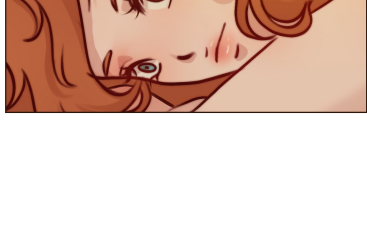
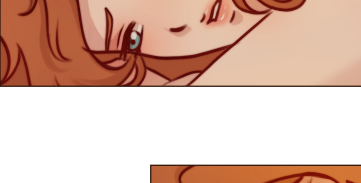
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BLOOM.



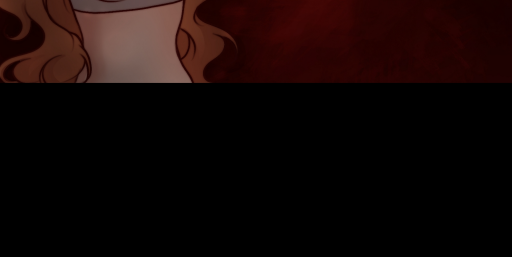
BLOOM, YOU NEED TO WAKE UP.



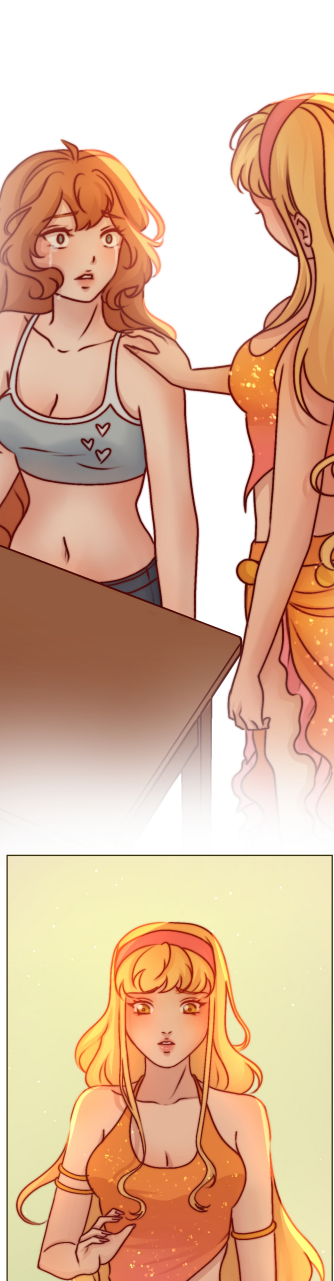
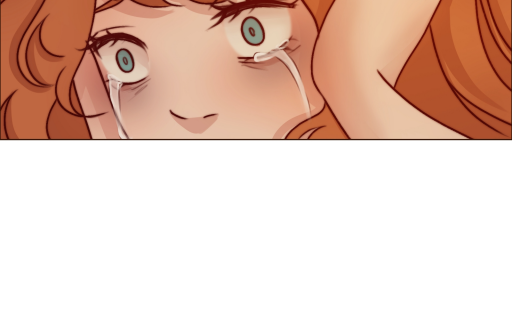


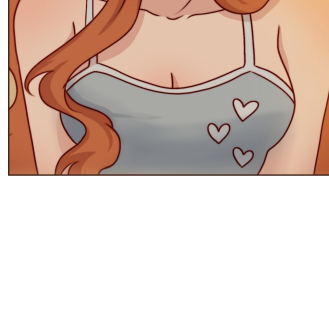
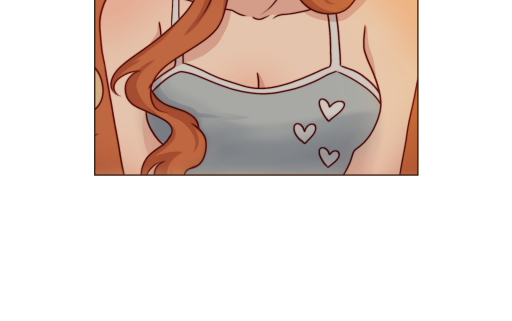
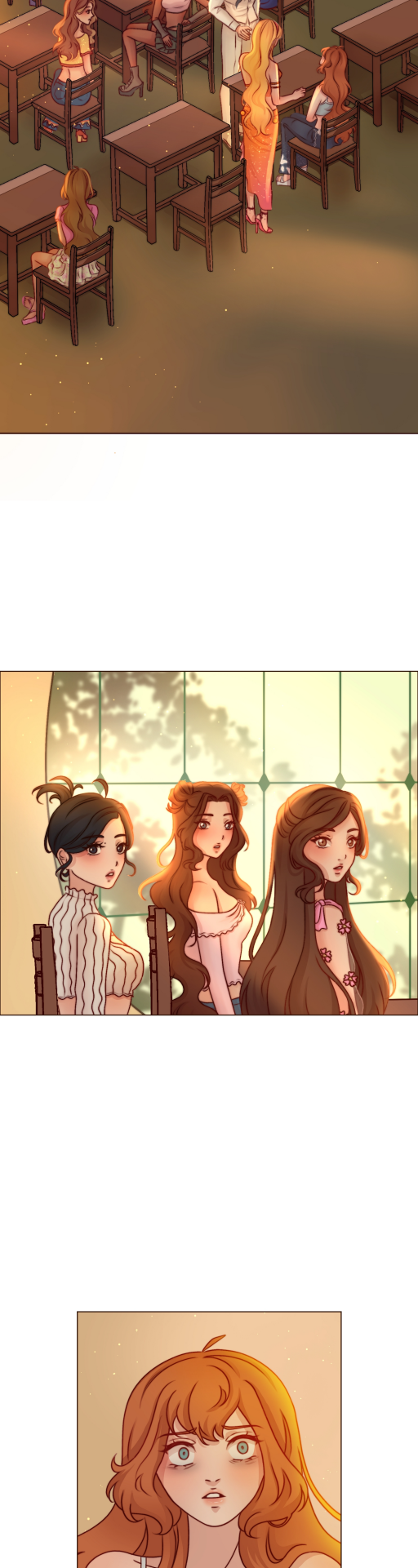
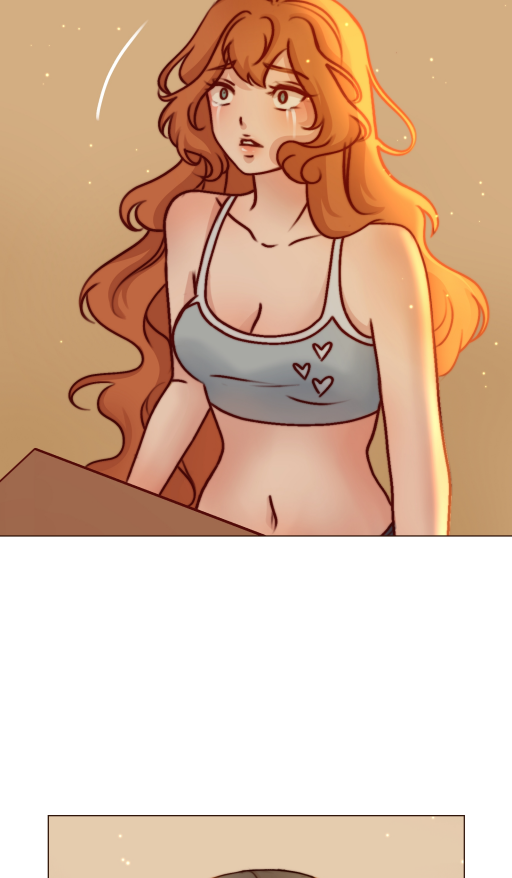
BLOOM, ARE YOU ALRI—

PLEASE, NO! DON'T TOUCH ME!



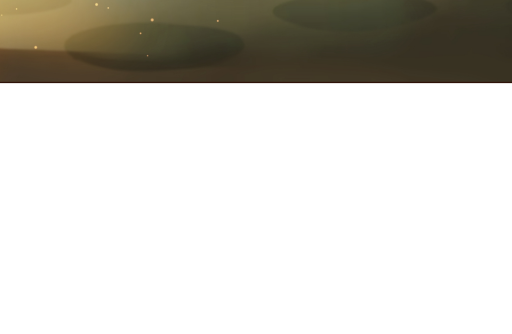
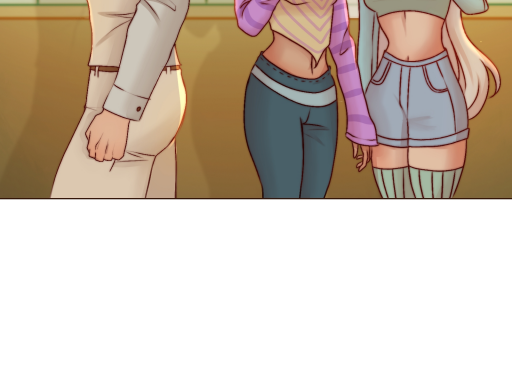
BLOOM...





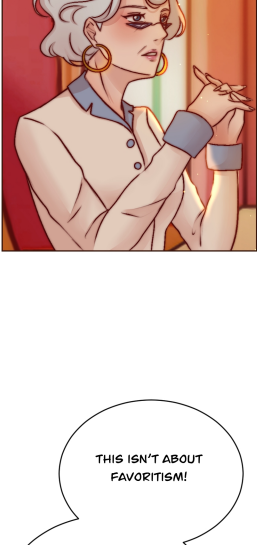
I'M SORRY,
PROFESSOR!





WE'VE ALREADY DISCUSSED THIS.

I CAN'T MAKE SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS FOR ONE STUDENT.

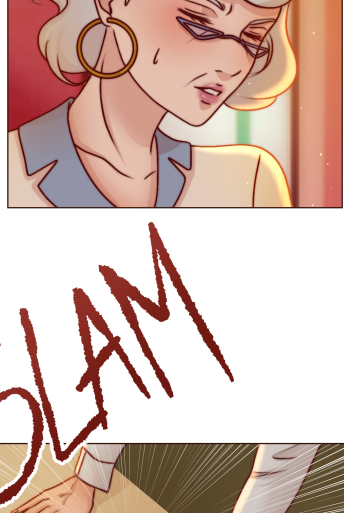


THIS ISN'T ABOUT FAVORITISM!

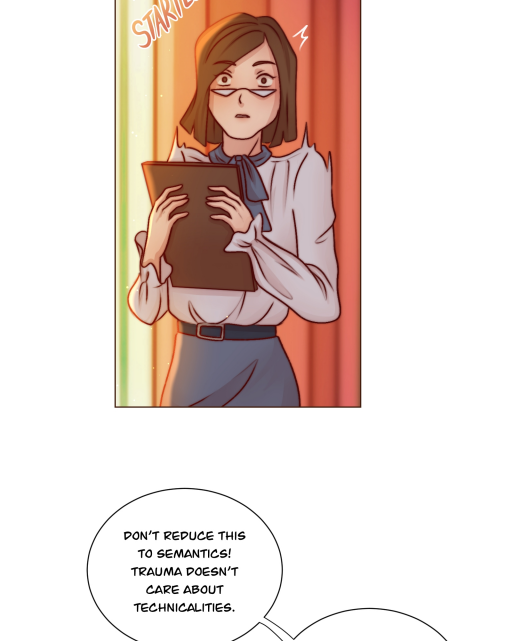
THE POOR GIRL HAD A PANIC ATTACK IN MY CLASSROOM TODAY. BECAUSE OF MY FACE!



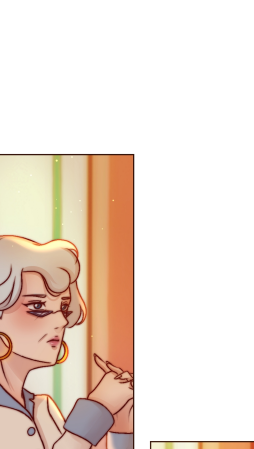
IT WASN'T YOU, IT WAS AN IMPOSTER. SURELY YOU UNDERSTAND—



SLAM

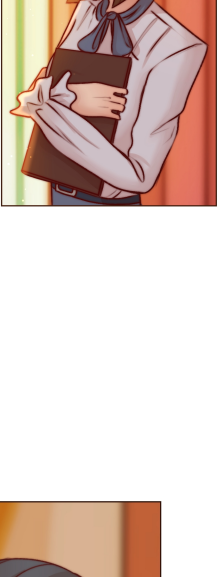
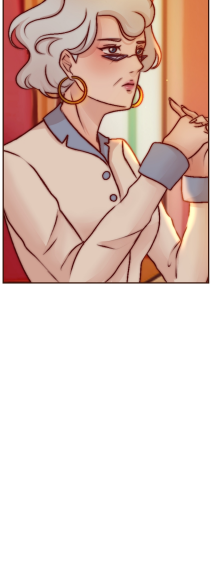


STARTLE



DON'T REDUCE THIS TO SEMANTICS! TRAUMA DOESN'T CARE ABOUT TECHNICALITIES.

YOU'RE ASKING HER TO LOOK HER ABUSER IN THE EYE EVERY SINGLE DAY.



WHALE



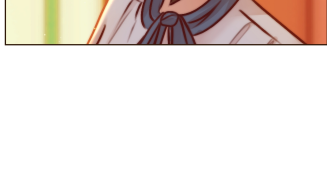
BLOOM IS STRONG,
STRONGER THAN
ANYONE SHOULD HAVE
TO BE.

SHE'S SAVED ALFEA
TWICE. ONCE AT
SEVENTEEN, WHILE
BARELY EVEN
UNDERSTANDING HER
OWN POWERS.



BUT SHE'S STILL
A GIRL,
FARAGONDA.

NOT A WEAPON.



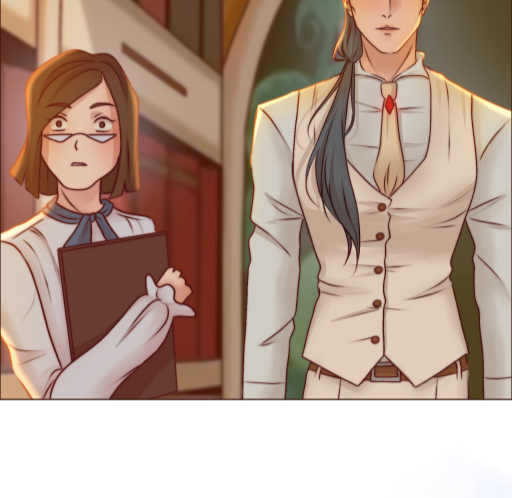
I KNOW AVALON.
I KNOW.



IT'S TIME YOU
BOTH KNEW THE
TRUTH.



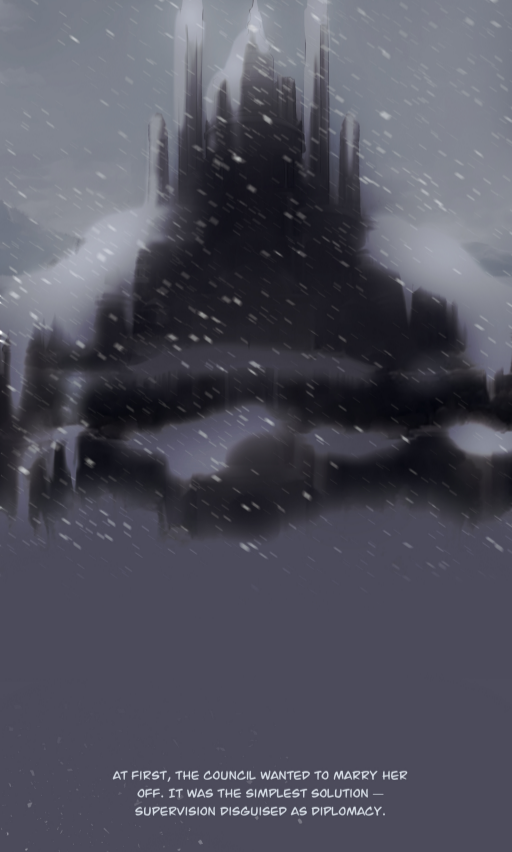
THE COUNCIL OF
MAGIX HAS
DEEMED BLOOM A
THREAT.



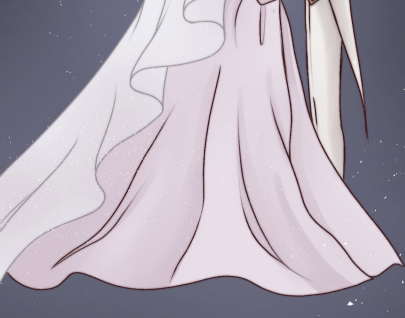
EVER SINCE IT CAME OUT THAT BLOOM WAS THE LOST HEIR
OF DOMINO, SHE'S BEEN UNDER THE COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY.



THE DRAGON FLAME IS TOO POWERFUL. THEY'VE ALWAYS
FEARED WHAT IT COULD BECOME, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT
UNEXPECTEDLY RESURFACED AFTER IT WAS SUPPOSEDLY
LOST WITH DOMINO ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.



AT FIRST, THE COUNCIL WANTED TO MARRY HER
OFF. IT WAS THE SIMPLEST SOLUTION —
SUPERVISION DISGUISED AS DIPLOMACY.



A POLITICAL UNION WOULD LET THEM KEEP THE
DRAGON FLAME UNDER CONTROL WHILE
BENEFITING FROM ITS POWER.

A POWERFUL KINGDOM,
ALLIED CLOSELY WITH THE
COUNCIL, TIED TO THE
KEEPER OF THE FLAME... IT
WAS PERFECT.

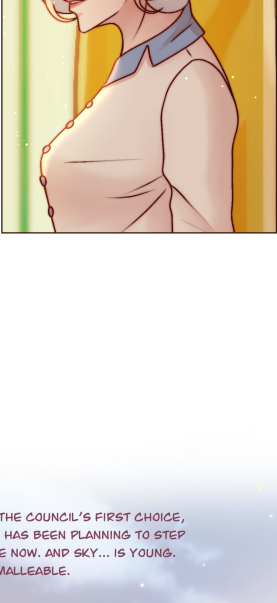
THEY'D GAIN ACCESS
TO THE MAGIC
WITHOUT BLOOM EVER
REALIZING SHE WAS
BEING MANAGED.



SO... SKY?



YES. BY CHANCE, OR
PERHAPS FATE, SHE
FELL IN LOVE WITH A
PRINCE. IT SPARED US
THE NEED TO PUSH.



ERAKLYON WASN'T THE COUNCIL'S FIRST CHOICE,
BUT KING ERENDOR HAS BEEN PLANNING TO STEP
DOWN FOR A WHILE NOW. AND SKY... IS YOUNG.
MALLEABLE.

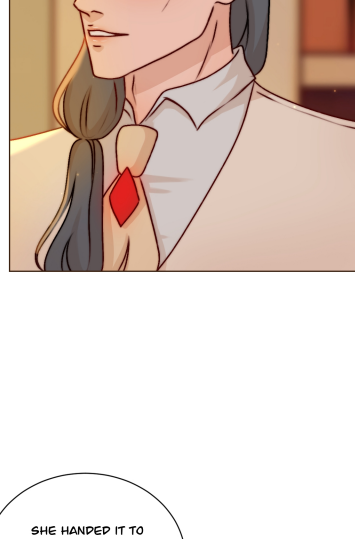


IF BLOOM STAYED WITH HIM, AND I KEPT
HER POWERS UNDER CONTROL, THE
COUNCIL WAS SATISFIED.

UNTIL LAST YEAR.

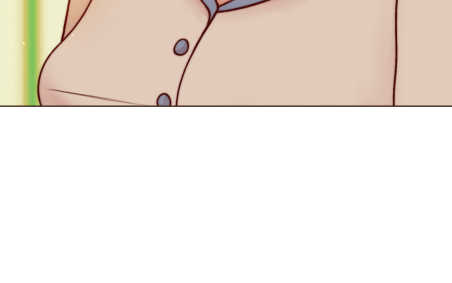


THE CODEX...

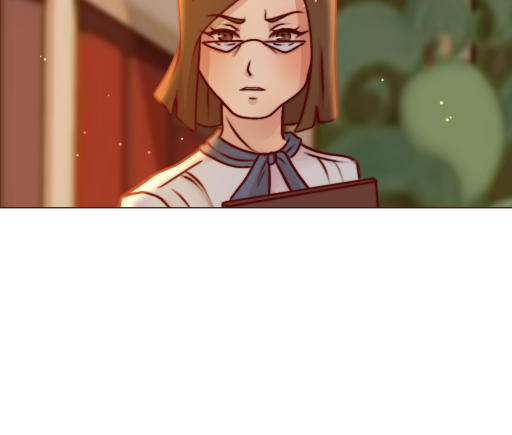


SHE HANDED IT TO
DARKAR. WHETHER BY
MANIPULATION OR NOT, IT
DIDN'T MATTER.

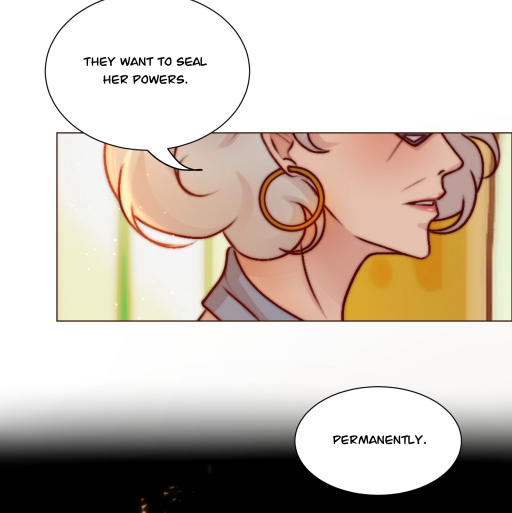
THE COUNCIL
PANICKED. THEY
CALLED FOR
ACTION. SEVERE
ACTION.



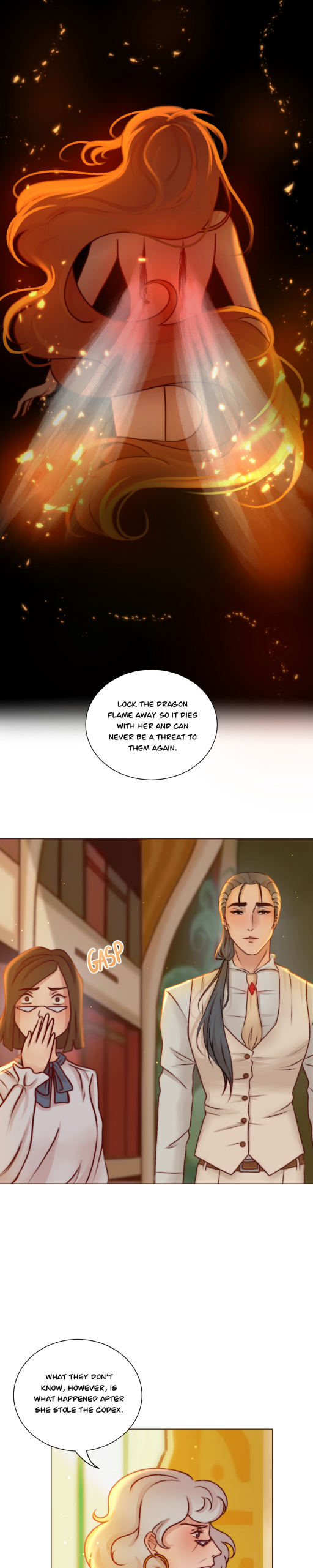
WHAT KIND OF ACTION?



THEY WANT TO SEAL HER POWERS.



PERMANENTLY.



LOCK THE DRAGON FLAME AWAY SO IT DIES WITH HER AND CAN NEVER BE A THREAT TO THEM AGAIN.

GASP

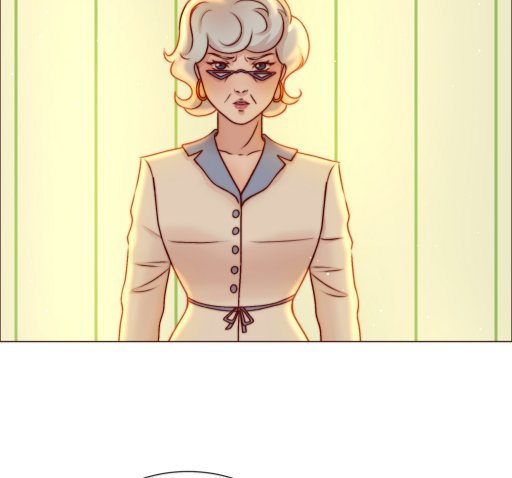
WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW, HOWEVER, IS WHAT HAPPENED AFTER SHE STOLE THE CODEX.



YOU WERE ABLE TO KEEP IT QUIET THAT SHE WAS KIDNAPPED BY DARKAR...



EXACTLY.



I WAS ABLE TO GET THEM TO RECONSIDER SEALING HER MAGIC AWAY, BUT IF THEY FIND OUT SHE WAS TAKEN AGAIN...

THAT SHE WAS USED—AGAIN—OR WORSE, THAT SHE HAS ANY KIND OF CONNECTION TO VALTOR...



ALL IT WOULD TAKE IS ONE WHISPER. ONE PARENT WITH THE RIGHT POLITICAL SWAY. ONE STUDENT SAYING THE WRONG THING. AND IT'S OVER.

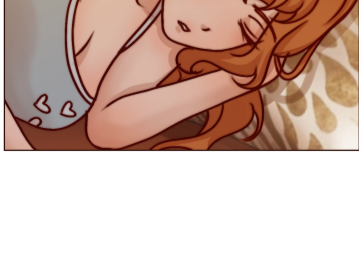
THEY'LL TAKE HER.



WE WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP IT. AS LONG AS THERE ARE NO MORE INCIDENTS... AND SHE STAYS WITH SKY... WE CAN PUT THIS BEHIND US.



AND SHE'LL BE SAFE.



End

Episode 23

Story • Art by Shiroyuki