

Life was good for Sakura Matou. Well, Sakura *Tohsaka* would be more fitting to say. She lived with her friends and family, she had a dear sister who looked out for her now, and a beloved boyfriend with her much-adored senpai. She had honestly never been happier before. The tragedies of her past would remain buried in the past, and she could face the future with a renewed sense of hope and optimism.

That is not to say there weren't challenges. Though the dark days of the Grail Wars were behind them, the repercussions prevailed to this day. The Class Cards they kept finding, the appearance of Shadow Servants. It all pointed to something sinister happening behind the scenes. Those things couldn't just be manifesting on their own; there had to be an explanation.

One that she and Rin were no closer to finding out.

It was... frustrating. They had claimed this city under their protection; they were the Second Owners after all (well, Rin technically was), but they were of the Tohsaka family. This city was their responsibility. These strange occurrences kept happening, and they were failing their city.

The divinity in her, the aspect that watched out for people, felt indignant and outraged that they were failing their duty.

It tied with another source of frustration that was much more personal in nature. Her home life.

She *was* happy, she truly was. She loved Shirou, and Shirou loved her... and her sister... and Saber.

Even without the aspect of love tied to Durga, Sakura was not blind to his affections for the other girls, or what they felt for him. It'd be quite hypocritical on her part to condemn them for it, considering her own 'relationship' with Rider.

But she still couldn't help herself, those ugly dark feelings. A remnant of the time she kept her silence and let the darkness consume her. She still felt certain apprehension about having her beloved senpai's attention be split with so many women.

Particularly when she felt Rin's blessing on him... She got a strong suspicion of what they did, what she did to *him*. She filled him with divine power, blessing him like the gods of old would bless mortals, empowering him, making a paragon of virility and heroic strength. A side of him

she had yet to see because she *wanted* to be the one to bless him. So... there was still a hypocritical side of her.

Why was it that they could all get along so well, but *Shirou* was the point of contention? It hadn't brought the two to any conflict; their arrangement made it so they would share their love with him as their hearts willed it.

And Rin, hosting *Ishtar*, had *plenty* of it to give. Plus, she was also the goddess of lust; she did not judge Rin when she wanted to sleep with other people. But it felt like she had gone a step too far, behind her back even, to put a sort of 'mark' on Shirou that denoted him as hers.

The warrior side of Durga was furious at the indignity of it all.

But there were bigger concerns, so she had to put it aside for now. The Class Cards, the Shadow Servants. Taiga was revealed to bear another Servant host, one to a divinity of Mesoamerica of all things. As she had proved with her outstanding strength and more mystical abilities.

She was *so overjoyed* when she discovered she couldn't gain weight no matter how much she ate. And Saber took it as a personal challenge not to be outdone by the teacher, so the two engaged in an eating contest that pretty much drained poor Shirou's house of any supplies. And when that wasn't done, the two began armwrestling.

Of course, their bodies pushed themselves and grew as a response, ripping their clothes to shreds and providing a fantastic spectacle that Sakura had to respect. Shirou certainly enjoyed it...

And Sakura did not miss just how elated Taiga was to have Shirou's attention, the way she smiled so lovingly at him... she wanted him to look at her like that. Though Shirou remained oblivious. But perhaps he was also far more preoccupied by how his food storage had been completely drained, or his house was on the verge of breaking apart.

Once more, she feared for her spot in senpai's heart. The good household wife place she had carved for herself in the Emiya household was threatened from all sides, and her warring goddess side was treating it like a battlefield.

“You’ll be fine.” Rider’s soft voice broke her out of her musings, once more offering a gentle smile she only reserved for her. “Shirou is lucky to have you, and one day he’ll see you’re the best for him.”

“I have plenty of competition in case you don’t remember,” Sakura muttered pessimistically.

“You’re always selling yourself short, even with the power of a god in you.”

“Hmm... Rider, am I right to feel this way?”

“Do not ask what is right, ask what you deserve. The heart is a complicated subject, and morality is muddled when the affairs of love are brought up.”

Sakura had to giggle at that particular line. “I didn’t know you could be so philosophical about subjects like this.”

“You remember I’m greek, right?” The pink-haired Servant’s smile shifted to a slightly more teasing one. “We like to pontificate and think far too much about everything.”

“Of course,” Sakura chuckled once more. She sighed, feeling a touch more relieved. “Now, let’s get the groceries back to the house,” She lifted one of the plastic bags she was holding. “Poor senpai’s fridge got raided that night.”

“He knows the risk of the companionship he keeps.” Rider shrugged, carrying her own set of bags.

“Hey now, it’s not his fault he-“

Sakura’s words died in her mouth as she saw something.

In between the bustling of the crowd, she spotted something further ahead.

Or rather, *someone*.

A very familiar hint of white.

"...Can't be." She muttered to herself.

"Sakura?" Rider called out in concern. "Is everything okay?"

The young woman did not answer; she merely kept watching as the figure seemed to look at her. Then she turned around and disappeared in the crowd.

"H-Hold this!" She thrust her bags into Rider's arms, much to her confusion. "There's something I gotta check out!"

"Wait, what is happening-?"

"Will explain later!" She held up her hands apologetically, running into the crowd and slowly disappearing from view. "I'll be back!"

"Sakura, wait!" But it was too late, her Master was gone. "Oh, dear..." Medusa sighed to herself. "What's going on *now*?"

X~X~X~X~X

Impossible. Improbable. Unlikely. A trick of the senses.

Sakura said all those words to herself as she ran through the streets. The people and buildings became blurry images as she focused on that single, brief image her eyes had spotted.

The white hair... the red eyes.

If it was true, then Sakura had to be absolutely certain.

The figure vanished each time she got closer, further away from the city, and into the forest. Yet Sakura followed all the same because this was something she could not ignore, something that held far more importance than her own wants and worries.

Her supernatural senses allowed her to pick up the trail left by the figure. Small traces of so very familiar magical energy. She dashed through the trees, moving further away from the city limits. Sakura knew where she was being led and understood it could not possibly be a coincidence.

Sakura huffed. The act of running wasn't what was taxing her, but the way her mind swirled with so many thoughts and turbulent emotions unbalanced her, even as her body ran with all the proficiency of a seasoned athlete on instinct alone.

She had to know. Gods, she had to make sure...

If this were true, then Shirou-

She had no idea how he'd react.

Sakura stopped, her feet came to a halt, carving a small trench in their wake. She panted, looking up with a pained and bewildered gaze at the sight in front of her.

An old, run-down castle, western-style. Built many years ago by a very influential, wealthy German family. A private property that had only been frequented by an extremely low number of people. Common folk in the city didn't even know this place existed beyond a few rumors that it was private property. Kept that way by the boundary fields created a mild mental suggestion to any non-mage trespassers to leave.

Castle Einzbern had seen better days. In the few years since the Grail War Ritual had met its end, the wear and tear had begun to accumulate on the once proud brick walls. The paint was scuffed. Tiles had fallen from years of rain. Plants were growing over the base of the walls, climbing and growing upon the very foundations with moss and branches. Foliage was overgrown, and she had no doubt the once beautiful and carefully maintained garden inside had gone wild.

Shirou did not come to the Castle much, or often... or at all.

It was just too painful for him. Remembering how Illya gave away her life to save them all from the Grail's corruption.

To save *her*.

Sakura always left a few flowers here every year, on the anniversary of that day. Always thanking Illya for the life she was given, for the opportunities she herself never had.

Sometimes she wondered what she might say if she were still here, seeing how they were all living.

“What a mess.”

Well, Sakura didn't have to wonder anymore.

Pearly white hair that reflected the sunlight, flowing against the wind.

The figure turned, and Sakura could see the full details of her outfit. It was white, with pink accents and purple gloves and tights. The outfit looked traditional, inspired by the old tribes of northern Asia. But the eyes, the *face*, it was unmistakable.

“...Illya,” Sakura muttered in disbelief.

“All these years and you couldn't afford to do a little maintenance on my castle?” She huffed, looking disappointed. “Well, I'm glad to know my property is being taken care of.” She said with evident sarcasm. “Guess this is the thanks I get...”

She looked older, like the age Illya was supposed to be before all the experiments her clan had performed upon her. Her voice sounded older, too. It could have been another of the Einzbern homunculi, but they knew the clan had effectively shut down after the Grail Wars came to an end. Their single-minded ambition of a thousand years had ended, and with it the last vestiges of what kept them going. They could have created another Justeaze model, but that was highly unlikely.

But it was her; every instinct Sakura had told her *this* was Illya.

“You're alive.” The violet-haired woman once more said, still in stupor.

“Very observant of you.” The young woman giggled with a wink. “Those divine senses are coming really handy, I see.”

“How?” Sakura took a tentative step forward, hands balled in front of her chest. “That they, the Grail, the Dress of Heaven, you-!” She let out a ragged breath. “You were gone, and we all had to-“

“Move on?” She flinched at Illya’s words. “Yeah, unsurprising. I would have done the same. Honestly, I’m glad you all were able to do so and make something for yourselves. Would have been *really* mad if I found out you were all moping. But look at you!” She put her hands akimbo. “Wielding fragments of the gods and making this place your own personal kingdom! Not even the Association or the Apostles dare to delve too deeply! Not too shabby, I’d say.”

“It’s...” Sakura stammered, taken aback by the *suddenness* of it all. “It’s more complicated than that.”

“I’m sure.”

Sakura shook her head, focusing on what was important. “But how are you alive?!”

“Oh boy, that was a *trip* and a half...” The Einzbern woman sighed, running a hand through her long white locks. “When the Grail came undone, my body dissolving itself down to the last magical circuit, it was like my soul was getting pulled into every direction. But... there was enough of the Grail’s system still active there to make a *connection*.”

“A connection?”

“There are a lot of powers keeping an eye on the world, even with the Age of Myth long since ended. A few took notice of what was happening and decided to... put me back together as best as they could.”

“*I dare say we did a fantastical job!*” Sakura straightened when a disembodied voice rang out. “*That new body is a work of art!*”

A newcomer manifested in a show of golden dust, going from spiritual to corporeal. A Servant, Sakura realized. Long feathery wings for arms, crooked bird legs, her exposed skin was pale, and the slightest bit of modesty kept her nipples covered. At first, she thought she was a

harpy, but there were very few figures from greek legend who could qualify, and the magical power she was feeling from this woman did not feel similar to Heracles or Medusa.

“So a little more appreciation is warranted!” The winged woman huffed, ruffling her feathers at Illya, who merely chuckled.

“Of course, of course. This body is marvelously done! I do appreciate that you all gave it my true age.” She sighed exaggeratedly. “It was so taxing to remain a cute innocent girl well past her years.”

“Innocent?” The harpy droned. “Freya could already tell you were a bit of a sadist before.”

“Hmph!” Illya puffed her cheek indignantly.

“I’m... sorry, who are you?” Sakura slowly asked.

“This is Louhi, from Finnish legend, as Berserker class,” Illya answered for the Servant. “She was contracted to me to keep an eye on me. Not that it’s necessary.”

“I daresay it’s very necessary given your history.” The harpy, Louhi, muttered.

Sakura picked up another name they mentioned. “Did you just say, Freya? The goddess Freya?” A very powerful deity of the Norse legends.

“Indeed. As my soul was vanishing, Lady Freya gathered what remained of my essence and crafted a new vessel for me.” She twirled as if to show it off. “Using the body of Sitonai from Ainu legends, filling it with a portion of her power.”

“And used the essence of yours truly to serve as the glue that tied it all together!” Louhi proudly said, placing a wing over her chest and puffing it proudly. “After all, as someone who straddles the line between mortality and mysticism, my own essence was the perfect ingredient to revive our little princess here!”

Illya gave her a suspicious glare. “I still question why exactly Lady Freya did not bother using any German legends as the basis for this new body...”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Is the little lady picky about how she was *resurrected*? A feat that would have been *impossible* without the literal *divine intervention*.” Louhi huffed. “I’d say someone is acting a touch ungrateful.”

“Would it have killed you two to put, I dunno, Frau Holle, Brunhilde, or Perchta in there?!”

“Perchta?! Are you insane?! She’s a deity of terrifying gloom!”

“And you’re a crooked witch!”

“History is biased!”

“Can we *focus*?!”

The last shout came from her, and the other two women watched as the smallest bit of Durga’s anger slipped through. The constant noise, the antics, were grating on her because there were still so many things she *needed* to know.

Sakura stared firmly at Illya as she crossed the distance between them. “Illya... how long have you been alive?”

The Einzbern paused for a moment. “A few months”

“Months,” Sakura repeated incredulously. “You’ve been back for *months*, and you haven’t told Shirou?” Though her words lacked intensity in terms of volume, there was no mistaking the outrage in her voice.

All this time, he blamed himself for her loss. Kiritsugu’s daughter, the last member of his family. To have seen Illya just sacrifice her life for them had marked Shirou in ways few things ever could. And he carried that burden to this day.

To know his sister was alive and well... Sakura could already imagine the joy he’d feel. But she could not ignore the fact that Illya had chosen to remain hidden from him for months.

“This... is not a conversation I want to have in the open.” Illya decided. “Louhi, keep watch, okay? We’ll take this to the Mirror World.”

“Got it.”

“The what?” Sakura shook her head.

Illya merely raised a hand, and the ground underneath them shimmered. A circle expanded under their feet, opening a way to *somewhere*. A flame of fractal images, dark reflections, and glittering lights.

It seemed to swallow their surroundings with their expansion. Vanishing the forest around them and replacing it with endless vastness, the horizon and sky looked like shattered glass, reflecting upon itself multiple times. The only thing that remained of the world was the Einzbern castle; it looked intact, pristine. But not... right. Like it was a model more than a real thing.

Sakura could feel they were not in the linear reality anymore. This place was separated from the World but still ‘connected’ to it. This was a feat of powerful magic. Illya had always been a powerful mage, but this feat was only possible thanks to the divine power filling her.

“There,” Illya said. “We can speak more privately here.”

“Where are we?” Sakura questioned, looking at their surroundings.

“I call this place the Mirror World.” The white-haired woman explained. “I believe it was created as a result of so many Class Cards and Shadow Servants manifesting. So much essence from the Throne of Heroes creates fluctuations within the overlaying reality, which opens the way to other underlying textures. Particularly with”

“Fascinating.” She did not mean to sound sarcastic; it was an interesting concept, but not one she cared about at the moment. “Illya. Shirou’s your family, he *needs* to know you live!”

“What he *needed* was a life to call his own,” Illya argued with a frown. “Not the ideals he got from my father, not the weight of other people’s actions. *His own life*. And I know for a fact he’s happy now. He doesn’t need another piece of a very painful past entering his life again

out of the blue.” She shook her head. “It’s better this way. You know how he’d get if he knew I was alive again.”

“Don’t act like you understand what he needs.” Sakura countered. “Or what he feels. He’d be happy to know you’re alive, that you have a second chance to actually live your own life. He’d be so relieved!”

“That...” Illya sighed. “That is not the priority right now, Sakura. Freya did not bring me back out of the kindness of her heart. She wanted people working to prevent a major disaster brewing.”

“A disaster?”

“Gods as powerful as her, or the ones you and Sakura host, exist outside linear time. They can already tell when something is happening. Or will happen. The Age of Gods may remind in the past, in the Reverse Side of the World, but they still watch.” Illya said. “Sometimes they act. Comforting huh? To have somewhat responsible gods watching over this world.” She said it with the slightest bit of sarcasm.

“Does this have anything to do with the Class Cards?”

Illya’s expression darkened, and she spoke out of personal indignation. “Those things made with the Grail’s knowledge, and fragments of material stolen from the Einzbern.” Complicated as her relationship with her clan may be, it was clearly a matter of pride for her. “Are creating far too many problems already. If they’re not empowering really ‘questionable’ individuals, they’re creating irregularities in the world that lead to the formation of Shadow Servants.”

“Do you have any idea who’s behind them?” They’ve been after this mystery for so long now.

“Only a few theories. They’re clearly resourceful and have my family’s knowledge.” She said. “But as for their goal? That’s muddier still. I don’t discard the possibility of other deities just taking advantage of the situation just to have fun.” She sniffed. “Your sister is a prime example.”

Sakura grew defensive of Rin. “Just because she hosts Ishtar-“

“She’s made the city her own pleasure kingdom. I’ll give her this; she’s managed to restrain herself. But this is still far from ideal. Mystery from the Age of Gods is overflowing into the modern era, and you know how the logic of the world reacts to that sort of thing.” She said. “If this keeps up, we might be looking at such levels of imbalance that our reality might splinter off into a sort of time singularity, expelled from the nominal timeline.”

That... was a serious outcome to consider.

“Your sister is not helping the matter,” Illya said a touch accusingly. “She’s spreading the blessings of Ishtar, and as the mystical forces keep swelling in Fuyuki, then it’ll attract the attention of more powerful players. I believe this is exactly what the one behind the Class Cards wants, for sufficiently powerful factions to be interested in the resurgence of mystery. They’ll see this city and its secrets, the source of the power people are wielding, as a prize to be claimed.”

And if more and more Divine Spirits and powerful Servants kept arriving...

Fuyuki was turning into a bubble bound to burst. Sakura couldn’t begin to imagine the consequences if the World decided to intervene directly via the Counter Force.

The will of the gods and the will of the world were not often the same, given the independent nature of divine spirits. The divine spirits they were all hosting seemed to be content with taking a backseat, experiencing the world through the eyes and actions of their hosts. Durga had not pushed her to do anything, nor did she feel any compulsions. Then again, Sakura suspected that might change if she were to find demons.

Rin, however... sometimes she worried about her sister. She behaved as if hosting the divinity of Ishtar was the best thing that had ever happened to her. The way she indulged and sought pleasure and satisfaction. She could understand, and even respect, turning Fuyuki into a place that would not be harmed by outside influences like the Association. There were many who treated Rin like another ‘barbarian’ unfit to be in their halls, like everything she owned was merely at the behest of the Association.

Well, Rin’s rise in power made them all take a step back. The mystery she wielded from Ishtar’s power made her all but immune to anything they could come up with. Not even the Queen would dare fight Rin straight on.

And Rin knew she did not need the Association anymore, the knowledge and mysticism Ishtar provided had made her into one of the most powerful beings of the current age. She could

revolutionize the world of magecraft if she wanted to. And Sakura had no doubts that her sister had to have plans stored for later.

Rin was an ambitious person, even before hosting the mesopotamian deity.

Was Sakura overthinking things? Was she worrying too much? It was... improper to think of her sister as someone who would act so recklessly. Rin had a good heart.

But there was always the possibility that Ishtar's instincts could be leading her astray.

"Why did you reveal yourself to me?" Sakura asked, trying to connect these last dots. "You wanted to keep your distance and investigate. Why now?"

"Because there's only so much Louhi and I can do on my own," Illya said. "Freya may have a lot of power as a goddess of witchcraft, but her Sight is not as powerful as Odin's. There are many ways these events could unfold, and the culprit's identity and goal remains a mystery to me."

Sakura's lips thinned. "You need help."

"I need help." She said, making a face like the words themselves tasted sour. "And I know you're more likely to cooperate than your sister."

"You think she's a culprit in all this?"

"I think the powers of Ishtar are getting to her head, and that'd she'd rather keep things going in a way she can control instead of fixing them. Freya tasked me with ending the problem of the Class Cards. But if Rin gets the idea of harnessing their power, and amasses enough followers..."

"She'd turn the entire order of the Moonlit World upside down." The violet-haired girl admitted. "Rin... hates what it did to our family. The obsession, the ethics of mages. She'd want to make sure it never hurts us, or anyone else, ever again."

No Apostles, no mad mages willing to sacrifice innocents for the goal of reaching the Root. Nothing that would ever threaten her family or her people again.

Sakura could understand her feelings. She shared them evenly. She just... didn't want her sister to go down a bad path as she had.

"I'm not going to spy on my sister." She made that clear.

"Wouldn't expect you to. I want you to at least try to curve her impulses and make her focus on the bigger picture." Illya replied. "None of this 'kingdom making. If she wants to uproot the order of the Moonlit World, then go for it, but only after we deal with the current problem before it all spirals out of control."

"I can promise I'll try." Rin was stubborn even before Ishtar. "I'll help you, Illya."

Illya clapped her hands together. "Wonderful!"

"If," Sakura stressed, "You promise to eventually let Shirou know you're alive."

That made the white-haired woman pause for a moment. Looking like she was seriously debating it internally. "I... will," She sighed. "But at a time of my choosing. Don't try to force a reunion that neither of us is ready for... especially him." She muttered the last part.

"I guess that's the best I can expect out of you." Sakura shrugged and rubbed the bridge of her nose. When had life become so complicated? "What's our first step?"

"First?" Illya grinned.

And Sakura stiffened when she felt her magical energy soar.

Illya grunted, clenching her fists to her side as the volume of mana rose to impressive levels. Her form started swelling, expanding with size and girth. Her height extended proportionally to the growing mass of her muscles, which tightened the robes around her person until they were wrapping around the curvature of her developing muscles.

Tights highlighted the myriad muscles of her legs, from the calves that widened past her shins to the four large muscle groups in her quads. Quivering as they bloomed, the rippling muscle

stretched the fabric to its limit. Her arms throbbed to prominence, 'punching' out thick biceps and exploding deltoids that lightly tore at the material of her clothing. Illya's torso expanded notably, rising wing-like lats as her core exposed more of the material wrapped around it, showing the outstanding definition of her abdominal muscles. Her breasts swelled impressively, putting the mana-crafted fabric to the test as the entirety of her attire seemed to cling solely on hopes and dreams. Her body was *tremendous* in size and power, a hulking figure that purposely stood even taller than Sakura in her empowered state.

No doubt, she sought to imitate a Berserker that was very dear to her.

She huffed, panting repeatedly as the transformation reached its end. "I'm still getting used to the power surge..." She muttered. "Even my old body didn't have this much, and I was literally made into a mana battery."

"You haven't transformed much before, have you?" Sakura remembered the first few times she transformed, how it overwhelmed her body with sheer power. It had been... unforgettable experiences. "You intend to fight me?" She asked, already figuring out what Illya intended.

"Call it a friendly spar." Illya quipped with a wink as she summoned a long, wide blade, which soon glimmered with pearly white frost emanating from its edge. "It's the best way to see if you can handle this task, and to test myself against our potential enemies."

Sakura only blinked a few times before chuckling softly. "If that is what you wish..."

A torrent of potent divine mana shrouded her figure, and it cleared away to reveal Sakura clad in the powers of Durga. Her hair had gone a white-pink, her eyes red like gems. And her musculature stood out with impressive girth and definition, muscles ferociously honed for battle. She was clad in white and red fabrics that left little to the imagination, brandishing all of her divine musculature. She summoned two spears of red and black, with helix-like shapes crafted in the openings of the weapons.

"Careful, though, Durga is the lady of war."

"But are you its master?" Illya goaded. "Or do you risk losing yourself to Durga's rage?" Frost seemed to build around Illya's form like the incoming avalanche.

"I can assure you, Illya." Her form brimmed with shining power. "Rin is not the only fighter in the family."

The two vanished in a blur of movement, and their weapons clashed, making the Mirror World tremble.

X~X~X~X~X

With her speed, it did not take Medusa long before she left the groceries in Shirou's house. She'd left them for the man to sort through and store properly, and left without much of a word. Her priority was to find Sakura, something easy to do thanks to the bond they shared.

But the moment her beloved Master's signature vanished, Medusa's skin itched, feeling scaly. And she pushed her speed further towards its last known location.

Last time she was with Sakura, the girl was extremely anxious about something, offering no explanation as she ran off to check something by herself. Something that, annoyingly, she chose not to disclose to Medusa. She had been in so much of a hurry that she had not even waited for her Servant to catch up.

Now she couldn't feel her, leading Medusa to fear the worst.

Following her smell was easy enough; it led her all the way to the abandoned Einzbern castle.

Which was not so abandoned, given the presence of the harpy standing before its gates.

She came to a grinding halt, and the bird-woman looked at her with wide eyes.

For a moment, neither said anything.

"And just who are you?" The harpy demanded with a raised brow.