



**THE WORLD OF
OTOME GAME
IS A SECOND CHANCE
FOR BROKEN SWORDS**

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**The World of Otome Game
is a Second Chance for Broken Swords**

Story Starts

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Chapter 6 -

The Calm

Rustle.

Leon groaned, a low sound of reluctant consciousness escaping his throat as he forced his eyes open to the familiar ceiling of his dormitory room at the Holfort Academy. The plasterwork above him was barely visible in the pre-dawn gloom, patterns of shadow and faint light that his tired mind couldn't quite process yet. Seeing as there was still no light peeking through the heavy curtains and no sound coming from his alarm clock, Leon allowed himself the luxury of a few more minutes of rest.

He placed his forearm across his forehead, the slight pressure somehow comforting, and closed his eyes once more, surrendering to the quiet darkness behind his eyelids as he basked in the relative peace of his own thoughts.

Rustle. Rustle.

It had been a few days since the academy, his barony, and the adventurer's guild had organised that special dungeon dive—an expedition that had been far more successful than he'd initially dared to hope.

After all the preliminary reports had been filed, the success of contracting with close to a hundred guardian spirits properly documented and verified, his barony had received special commendations from the royal palace itself.

Rustle. Rustle.

To be completely honest, they'd been remarkably lucky that Margot had managed to attract quite a number of genuinely skilled adventurers to his territory when she'd established a branch of the guild on his lands. Her reputation alone had drawn experienced dungeon divers, people who knew what they were doing rather than the usual collection of glory-seekers and inexperienced fools. Perhaps that was precisely why the palace and the academy had so easily allowed the raid to begin with minimal bureaucratic resistance.

Dungeons found much closer to the surface of the planet—that toxic, mana-saturated wasteland that humanity had fled centuries ago—tended to be exponentially more difficult and dangerous than those found at the relatively safer altitudes where civilisation now existed.

This particular phenomenon was probably due to the undeniable fact that the planet's surface remained saturated with raw, unfiltered mana. The concentration was toxic to humanity—hence precisely why they lived in the skies. Dungeons found much closer to the surface naturally absorbed significantly greater amounts of ambient energy, making them more

dangerous, more unpredictable, and paradoxically more rewarding for those brave or foolish enough to delve into their depths.

At least, that was the prevailing theory outlined in the collaborative paper they'd attached to the comprehensive report submitted to the adventurer's guild headquarters at the end of their successful dungeon raid.

Rustle. Rustle.

Recently, it had been growing rarer for adventurers to successfully contract with guardian spirits—a concerning trend that had worried both the guild and the kingdom's military strategists. And yet their recent raid had somehow produced the highest number of successful contracts in recent recorded history, a statistical anomaly that demanded explanation.

Nearly everyone who had actively participated in the raid had contracted at least one guardian spirit, some even forming bonds with multiple entities. The only participants who couldn't contract any guardian spirits at all were many of the academy professors who'd accompanied them.

The prevailing theory, supported by their observational data, was probably due to the rather mundane fact that the professors weren't really active combatants in the raid itself. They had merely provided support roles from the periphery, standing ready should a student blunder catastrophically or put lives at genuine risk through reckless actions.

Rustle. Rustle.

With their recently submitted theories now in official circulation within guild channels, the adventurer's guild leadership had apparently decided to begin systematic testing in dungeons that hadn't provided a single contracted guardian spirit in years, perhaps even decades. They planned to lower these supposedly 'depleted' dungeons into the troposphere for an experimental period of one year to properly test the mana-saturation theories Leon and his team had proposed.

Angelica, of course, had immediately asked if she could send this potentially groundbreaking theory to her father and brother as well—the Redgrave family would certainly benefit from such tactical intelligence. After Margot had made some careful arrangements, consulting with guild leadership and ensuring proper protocols were followed, this request had been allowed, provided the sensitive information didn't leak to outside parties for now. They wanted to maintain this particular strategic advantage for as long as reasonably possible, lest the kingdom's numerous enemies exploit it for their own purposes.

Getting on Duke Redgrave's good side was a bonus as well.

Rustle. Rustle.

An arm was suddenly draped across Leon's chest with surprising gentleness, the weight warm and somehow comforting as a body shifted closer beneath the sheets. A head nuzzled affectionately at the crook of his neck, soft hair tickling his skin, breath warm against his throat.

He could immediately identify the subtle, sweet, distinctly fruity scent that could only belong to Meltryllis—a fragrance that reminded him strongly of the

amaryllis flowers growing in careful profusion around their barony's lunar dungeon entrance.

Leon had finally made the decision to bring all his guardian spirits to the academy with him.

He had specifically taken time to apologise sincerely to both Durga and Meltryllis for his previous reluctance to bring them along. They had simply smiled at him with infinite patience as they held his hand between theirs, their touches gentle and understanding. Of course, they would know the real reason why he'd hesitated, the true source of his reluctance. After all, they had already looked deeply into his soul and accessed his memories before forming the sacred contract that bound them together. They understood about Sakura, about his failures, about the weight he carried from his previous existence.

They had spent that entire night talking about her—about Sakura Matou, someone he had catastrophically failed to protect in his previous life, someone whose loss he really hadn't properly processed alongside the losses of Rin and Saber and everyone else he'd cared for. The conversation had been painful, dredging up memories he'd tried to bury, forcing him to confront failures he'd tried to forget.

But in the end, Leon found himself genuinely thankful for the difficult talk as he felt an enormous emotional weight gradually lift off his shoulders, a burden he hadn't fully realised he'd been carrying until it was finally, mercifully gone.

Rustle. Rustle.

Meltryllis shifted slightly, her arm still draped across him, clearly still half-asleep herself. Her breathing remained slow and even, peaceful in a way that suggested she had no intention of waking anytime soon.

Then came a soft, sultry moan that sent warning bells clanging in Leon's increasingly alert mind—and that sound definitely hadn't come from Meltryllis.

Leon suddenly felt unexpected pressure on his hips, and two small hands braced firmly on his chest just above where Meltryllis's arm lay. He opened his eyes fully, morning drowsiness evaporating instantly as his tactical awareness snapped into sharp focus.

Heterochromic gold and silver-grey met startled, mischievous blue.

With absolute, undeniable clarity, Leon saw that Olivia was straddling his hips beneath the tangled sheets, positioned carefully to avoid disturbing the still-sleeping Meltryllis at his side. A certain morning physiological reaction he absolutely couldn't control—curse his traitorous biology—pressed unmistakably against something warm and soft through the thin fabric of their respective nightclothes.

'Oh. Oh no.'

Blink. Blink.

Olivia's smile widened.

Blink. Blink.

Leon's mind scrambled for explanations, for escape routes, for *something*.

Blink. Blink.

The moment stretched into terrible, mortifying eternity as reality crashed down upon Leon's consciousness with the force of a collapsing dungeon ceiling.

Olivia traced a deliberate line across Leon's chest with one finger, her face flushed, her voice dropping to a husky whisper: "Good morning, onii-chan. Shall I perform my duties as your primary mistress?"

A shrill, decidedly unmasculine scream erupted from a certain baron's dormitory room in the early morning stillness—echoing through the halls just as their first day back in academy classes was scheduled to resume, undoubtedly waking half the dormitory floor and guaranteeing Leon would face questions he absolutely did not want to answer.

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"Stupid Leon."

Angelica heard Olivia mutter the words, probably for the twentieth time in the past hour of their study session. The complaint had taken on an almost rhythmic quality by now, each repetition tinged with a different shade of frustration that Angelica was beginning to catalogue despite herself.

Two members of her retinue—Isolde Fou Ashforde and Beatrice Fou Sinclair—both shot the scholarship student a disdainful look. But when Olivia met their stares with those deceptively innocent blue eyes, they quickly looked away, suddenly finding their textbooks utterly fascinating.

They were children of viscounts in the Redgrave territory, many of them close to Angelica's own age—a calculated tradition among vassal families. When news reached them that their liege had produced an heir, they would often arrange for another child themselves, timing births to create natural peer relationships. It was meant to facilitate better bonds between families, especially if their children should attend the same academy. A network of loyalty built from cradle friendships and shared lessons—or so the theory went.

Whilst members of her retinue hadn't been able to participate in the dungeon raid during their school break—many called home by their families or held by prior commitments—they remained unaware of just how devastatingly powerful the academy scholar truly was.

Yet even without witnessing Olivia's combat prowess firsthand, even without seeing her eliminate entire floors of monsters with terrifying efficiency, there was something about the girl that made confrontation seem inadvisable. It wasn't anything obvious, nothing one could point to and name with certainty. Olivia's demeanour remained cheerful most of the time, her smile bright and seemingly guileless. But there was a quality beneath the surface—something in the way she held herself, perhaps, or the occasional flash in those doe eyes when someone pushed too far.

Angelica had witnessed that transformation firsthand during their expedition—the way Olivia could shift from playful to coldly efficient in a heartbeat, like watching clouds pass over the sun. One moment laughing at some absurdity, the next moment descending through dungeon floors with single-minded focus, eliminating wave after wave of monsters whilst cackling with an enthusiasm that was simultaneously terrifying and oddly endearing.

That image had burned itself into Angelica's memory: Olivia's face lit with manic glee as her hair constructs and creatures tore through enemies, her laughter echoing off crystalline walls, her guardian spirits moving in perfect synchronisation with her commands. Beautiful and frightening in equal measure.

So whilst Isolde and Beatrice might not know the specifics of what Olivia could do, they clearly sensed *something*—some instinctive warning that this particular scholarship student was different, was dangerous in ways that had nothing to do with social standing or noble bloodlines.

Angelica could admit, privately, in the quiet corners of her own thoughts, that she didn't particularly want to be subjected to that cold efficiency herself. Not in anger. Not directed at her.

Stories of their personal victory over a dungeon's final boss had already circulated throughout the campus, growing more elaborate with each retelling. Some versions had Angelica single-handedly destroying the cosmic horror with blazing magic. Others credited the guardian spirits they contracted that accompanied their small group. A few even suggested divine intervention.

Still, most students chalked their success up to either the strong guardian spirits that had accompanied them or to Angelica's own considerable abilities in carrying the team. Few believed that the newly elevated baron and the commoner-born scholarship student could have contributed equally to such a feat.

Angelica supposed she should feel pleased by such confidence in her capabilities, the assumption that a duke's daughter would naturally be the strongest member of any party she joined. Yet she knew what she'd witnessed. She could still see, with perfect clarity, how both Leon and Olivia had matched—perhaps even exceeded—what a full raid party could accomplish.

The larger expedition group had felled the other boss monsters on different floors, which only reinforced the prevailing opinion that Angelica, Olivia, and Leon had been merely escorted to the final chamber because Baron Bartfort owned the lands. It was, after all, a regular arrangement carried out by landed nobles who possessed dungeons in their territory—allowing the landowner and select companions safe passage to contract with guardian spirits whilst professional adventurers handled the actual combat.

It provided at least a convenient cover for the truth. Easier to let people believe the comfortable lie than try to explain that two upstarts might actually be one of those once-in-a-decade talents.

"Master, here's some tea," Britomart announced softly, currently wearing a maid uniform—something that Olivia had easily provided with disturbing efficiency and enthusiasm.

She knelt beside the low table with practised grace, filling a cup with precise, measured movements before distributing it to everyone gathered. The delicate clink of porcelain against porcelain filled the comfortable silence.

Slam.

The door burst open with enough force to rattle the frame, the sudden violence of it making everyone except Olivia flinch.

"Lady Angelica." Genevieve Fou Montrose rushed in, another daughter of one of her father's vassals—this one serving as Angelica's primary information gatherer, the quiet observer who always seemed to know everything happening on campus before anyone else. She paused just inside the doorway, struggling to catch her breath, one hand pressed against her heaving chest. Her face was flushed—whether from exertion or outrage, Angelica couldn't immediately tell, though she suspected both. "That... that *girl*." Genevieve practically spat the word. "She had the prince purchase an elven sexual attendant this morning. They were seen leaving the auction house together before dawn."

The words hung in the air like a physical blow.

Angelica felt something cold and sharp twist beneath her ribs, a sensation she refused to name even as it clawed at her carefully maintained composure. The teacup in her hand suddenly felt impossibly heavy, the delicate porcelain handle threatening to snap under the pressure of her grip.

Marie. Of course it was Marie. Who else could it be?

An elven attendant. Purchased by Julius. For *her*.

The implications crashed over Angelica in waves—each one more humiliating than the last. The statement it made. The disrespect it showed. The absolute confirmation that whatever relationship she and Julius had once shared was not merely strained but completely, irretrievably shattered.

She stood with deliberate slowness, bringing her saucer and teacup with movements she forced to remain steady despite the trembling threatening to overtake her hands. She turned her back to everyone, facing the window overlooking the academy grounds, grateful that none could see her face in this moment whilst she fought to rebuild her composure.

The view blurred slightly at the edges as she blinked rapidly, refusing—*refusing*—to let tears fall.

"Leave her," Angelica said, and she was proud that her voice emerged level and controlled, betraying nothing of the storm raging beneath her skin. "If she understood the true meaning of that attendant, she would realise the genuine nature of their relationship."

'If she possessed even a fraction of the sense I once credited her with,' Angelica thought bitterly, the words she couldn't speak aloud echoing through her mind with vicious clarity. *'If Julius retained any of the principles he once claimed to value. If either of them cared at all about honour, about propriety, about the meaning behind such gestures.'*

An elven attendant wasn't merely a servant. It was a statement. A declaration. Elves were rare, expensive, considered the most prestigious of all demi-human companions. To purchase one—especially through public auction where everyone would see, where rumours would spread—was Julius announcing to the entire kingdom that this girl, this poor viscount's daughter, was worth more to him than his betrothed, worth more than political alliance, worth more than everything his position represented.

"But still...!" Genevieve protested, her voice cracking with indignation on Angelica's behalf.

"My lady...!" Isolde added, half-rising from her seat, her textbook forgotten.

"But...!" Beatrice's objection joined the chorus, her usual composure slipping entirely.

Three of her retinue protested in overlapping voices, their words tumbling over one another as they assured Angelica that they wouldn't let her suffer such brazen disrespect, that the Redgrave name demanded response, that this insult couldn't stand unanswered.

Angelica talked them down with the same measured patience she'd cultivated since childhood, the same diplomatic skills her father had drilled into her since she was old enough to understand the weight of their family name.

She explained—calmly, rationally, as though discussing weather patterns rather than her own humiliation—that they should maintain the moral high ground. That if they started harassing the prince's... companion... it would only bring trouble to her family. The Redgrave name couldn't afford scandal, not over something so personally devastating yet politically insignificant in the grand scheme of noble politics.

Even as she spoke these rational, carefully chosen words, Angelica was gritting her teeth hard enough that her jaw ached, her free hand clenched into a white-knuckled fist hidden in the folds of her skirt where no one could see the physical manifestation of her fury.

But she took a deep inhale through her nose, held it for a count of five, and exhaled slowly through her mouth—a calming technique her mother had taught her years ago. She forced the tension from her shoulders through sheer will, straightening her spine, rebuilding her walls brick by careful brick.

Then she tilted her head back and took a large gulp of the tea Britomart had prepared. The temperature was cool enough not to burn her tongue—a small mercy in a morning that felt determined to scald her pride in every other possible way.

Angelica walked back to the table with measured steps, her posture perfect despite the turmoil churning beneath her carefully maintained exterior. She arranged her skirts with automatic precision as she sat, buying herself a few more seconds to ensure her expression revealed nothing.

"Let's not dwell on trivialities and finish with our studies," she said firmly, already reaching for her textbook as though nothing of consequence had just occurred, as though her entire world hadn't just shifted beneath her feet. "We have examinations approaching, after all."

The others exchanged glances—uncertain, unsatisfied, clearly wanting to say more—but they followed her lead. Textbooks opened. Pens scratched against paper. The rhythm of study resumed, a comfortable facade of normalcy stretched over the cracks.

Only Olivia remained silent, as she gave Angelica a stare she couldn't quite catch, and she gave Angelica a sincere yet commiserating smile as she too resumed her studies, reading through a textbook that was clearly marked for second years.

But as the members of her retinue finally excused themselves, Olivia opened her bag and brought out several bottles of wine.

"I think we need this today. Do you want to join me?" Olivia asked, waving a bottle of an expensive white wine that one of the speciality stores in the capital exclusively provides.

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After this morning's troubles, where Olivia had stormed out in a huff as she loudly proclaimed his idiocy before slamming the dormitory doors hard enough to rattle the hinges, the entire day had been an exercise in stubborn silence. For the whole day, Olivia sat as far from Leon as physically possible within the confines of the classroom, huffing loudly enough that several students turned to stare. Every time their eyes met—accidentally, inevitably—she would look away with such theatrical anger that Leon half-expected her to injure her neck from the force of it.

Of course, Leon, to a certain extent, believed that Olivia was genuinely serious with her proclamations of being his actual mistress. The problem wasn't her sincerity—it was his own inability to respond to it properly. He just hadn't really fully moved on from his past, from the weight of being Shirou Emiya, from the memories of Archer's endless regrets.

On top of that, he just didn't know if he could really provide the proper relationship Olivia would have wanted—the normal, healthy partnership she deserved.

It also didn't help with the faces his guardian spirits seem to adopt the faces of—

"Did you guys hear?" Daniel said, munching on fries. "Two of the rich first-years already got engaged. The girls are some of the nice ones, too—Milly and Jessica. Really kind, you know? Not the sort who'd treat you like a walking wallet. Wish one of the lucky guys could've been me, honestly. Would've been nice to have that sorted."

Raymond clearly tried to keep a calm, composed face even as Daniel sulked beside him, but the attempt was transparently unsuccessful. He still had a gloomy air about him that was impossible to miss, like storm clouds gathering on an otherwise clear day. He actually looked like he might burst into tears at any moment, his jaw tight with the effort of holding back emotion.

Leon couldn't really blame him for the reaction—after all, Raymond had genuine feelings for Milly, feelings that had been quietly nurturing throughout the term, and now those hopes had been definitively crushed.

They were currently hanging out in Leon's dormitory room, sipping drinks and snacking on an assortment of decidedly unhealthy foods. These weren't at all the same kind of refined treats they prepared for the formal tea parties with nobles and potential marriage prospects; instead, they were gloriously high in fat and mostly fried, the sort of comfort food that screamed of commiseration rather than propriety. The grease-stained plates and half-empty bottles spoke to the informal nature of their gathering—this was about drowning sorrows, not maintaining appearances.

"It's only natural they'd go for guys with higher status than us, really," Raymond said quietly, though his attempt at philosophical acceptance was undermined by the way his shoulders slumped dejectedly. "We never stood a chance against counts and viscounts, not really. Not when they can offer estates and connections we'll never have." He paused, swallowing hard, and when he spoke again his voice was carefully controlled. "Yeah, as long as Milly's happy, that's all that matters. That's what I keep telling myself, anyway."

Leon had specifically asked the two of them to come over to his room, knowing full well they were feeling thoroughly blue about the recent developments. He understood the sting of disappointment, even if his own romantic situation was complicated in entirely different ways. The wealthier men had a lot more to offer the women in material terms and had been very proactive in their courtship, moving with the aggressive confidence that came from knowing their proposals couldn't easily be refused.

There hadn't been much of an opening for men of lower status to mount a counter-attempt, not when they were competing against established wealth and influence. Milly and Jessica had been ideal partners, widely acknowledged as the top of their class in terms of marriageability—genuine, kind women who wouldn't treat their husbands like they were just a bank with two legs, which was depressingly rare amongst the nobility.

Now, with them spoken for, men were beginning to quarrel desperately over the remaining women, no matter how unideal the proposed arrangements might be.

These arrangements, from what Leon had overheard, wives would provide an heir whilst the wife funded her lifestyle at the capital with her husband's

money, purchasing for herself a rotating roster of sexual attendants to keep her entertained.

Some of these noble girls would also maintain relationships with multiple men under these arrangements, and, with the lack of technology to determine paternity with any certainty, nobody would know definitively who the father was of any child that resulted.

Daniel downed his soda all at once, the glass hitting the table with slightly too much force. "There's no hope left for me this year, none at all. The only girls left are absolute witches! And I don't mean that as a compliment."

Leon grimaced at the harsh description, though he couldn't deny that in the end, the characterisation was depressingly accurate. The remaining unmarried women of their year had reputations for exceptionally mercenary attitudes or thoroughly unpleasant personalities.

Raymond nodded miserably in agreement. "We just had monumentally bad luck, really. I mean, we have Prince Julius and the rest of the elites in our year to compete against. Compared to them, we're absolutely nothing—we might as well be invisible."

With handsome looks, prestigious social status, and seemingly bottomless funds of money, those men were in a completely different league altogether. The rest of them couldn't even begin to measure up against those advantages. What's more, with their pre-arranged marriages already settled by their families, the elite students had no need to compete in this desperate marriage market at all. No wonder they got to relax and watch the circus with amused detachment whilst everyone else scrambled for scraps.

"Hey, Leon," Daniel said, turning his concern directly on his friend with sudden focus. "Are things going well for you? You've been with your vassal, right? Olivia, I mean. I also heard you've gained another vassal recently, one who's also asking to be your mistress. That Mégane girl, yeah? Have you given up on proper marriage entirely? Is that the plan?"

Leon could only lean back against the cushions as he sipped his juice, buying himself a moment to formulate a response. He gave Daniel a noncommittal "Hmm."

"You'll dig your own grave with your decisions, you know," Raymond lectured, though his tone was more worried than genuinely critical. "Having two mistresses publicly and having female guardian spirits—even bringing them to campus where everyone can see. You're just shooting yourself in the foot at this point, socially speaking. You do realise that, don't you?"

Raymond pretended to be tough and stern as he delivered this assessment, but Leon knew him well enough to recognise that he was just genuinely worried about his friend's prospects. "That's why the other eligible women won't come near you. You've got a reputation now, deserved or not."

Lucle had said much the same thing during their last conversation, Leon recalled. His father's vassal had been the one who'd explicitly warned him about the unfavourable conditions that women habitually imposed upon desperate men, the way the marriage market exploited those who had limited options.

"I do have a tea date scheduled with Deirdre Fou Roseblade," Leon admitted after a moment, deciding that some honesty was warranted.

Both pairs of eyes immediately turned to Leon, widening in shock at this revelation. A Roseblade was hardly insignificant—that was a respected noble house.

"Though it's probably more of an obligatory tea date than anything romantic," Leon quickly backtracked, not wanting to give them false impressions. "I did assist her during that dungeon raid, after all. She's likely just being polite, fulfilling social obligations. Nothing more than that."

"Oh, yeah, I heard everyone who participated in that raid got themselves a guardian spirit," Daniel said, turning back to Leon with renewed interest. "Even the attendants who went along got contracts. That's incredible, isn't it? Unprecedented, really."

"Ah, yes, that was quite something," Leon agreed, remembering the complicated negotiations that had followed. "We had to make specific arrangements with the contracts of the attendants—legal provisions stating that if their current contractors break their contract for whatever reason, we retain the right of first purchase. It seemed prudent."

The thought of the loss of a key military asset just because some fickle noble grew tired of their attendant and dismissed them was something the Holfort Kingdom genuinely couldn't afford, not with the strategic value guardian spirits represented. Better to have safeguards in place.

"I heard as well that you'll be temporarily moving your territory closer to the capital so more people can take advantage of your dungeons," Raymond said, his excitement breaking through his earlier melancholy.

Of course, everyone had been excited about the new dungeons, especially one that seemed to produce guardian spirits with remarkable frequency. And judging from the quality of materials retrieved during preliminary raids, it was proving to be tremendously profitable as well. So, for the duration of the academic months, his floating island territory would relocate closer to the capital before returning to its usual position at every term's end.

"Yes, though the academy professors will be organising the actual raids with groups of experienced adventurers," Leon explained carefully. The particular dungeons he and Olivia had discovered were exceptionally dangerous, which was the main reason why they'd relegated the student participants to support roles immediately after the second boss. No point in getting academy students killed unnecessarily.

"Yes, but to have your very own guardian spirit," Raymond said wistfully, his eyes turning distant with longing. "That's real power, isn't it? The kind that changes everything."

Leon didn't particularly like the possessive wording of that statement—'your very own' made the spirits sound like property rather than partners—but he understood that everyone dreamed of adventure and power in their own way, so he let the comment go without correction.

"Will you be like—"

Then the door was suddenly slammed open with tremendous force, the handle hitting the wall with a bang that made everyone flinch.

"Hey, louse!" And in came his 'lovely' stepsister Jenna, flanked by her ever-present attendant. She stood arrogantly in the doorway, her head tilted upwards at an angle clearly designed to look down on Leon and his group of friends with maximum contempt. But Leon, watching carefully, could see the attendant flinch just a tiny bit as Leon stood up to his full height, reminded of exactly who he was dealing with.

Leon looked directly at both Daniel and Raymond, locking eyes with each of them in turn as he gestured meaningfully towards the door. A silent conversation passed between them—he didn't want to subject his stepsister's particular brand of unpleasantness on his friends, and they understood immediately.

The two gathered their things quickly as they stood up, thanking Leon politely for the drinks and snacks as they made their way to the exit. Though Leon did notice someone slip stealthily into the room just as the doors were about to close behind his departing friends, the figure bringing a finger to their lips in the universal gesture requesting quiet. Leon just raised his eyebrow at this unexpected development and chose to ignore it for now as he turned his full attention back to his stepsister.

"So what is it this time, oh dear sister of mine?" Leon asked with exaggerated patience, his tone dripping with barely concealed sarcasm.

"What the heck is going on?! Explain it to me right now!" Jenna frantically demanded, her composure already cracking around the edges.

Leon had a fairly strong inkling of what she was asking about, but he deliberately tilted his head at a questioning angle, playing ignorant. Sometimes making Jenna work for information was its own reward.

"Tell me everything you know about the situation with the first-year students. Right this minute!" she insisted, her voice rising.

Instead of answering immediately, Leon calmly poured two cups of tea from the pot on his table, the picture of unhurried courtesy. He pushed the cups forward across the table, his hands gesturing smoothly towards the empty couch in clear invitation for them to sit.

"Enough lazing about with your stupid tea!" Jenna snapped, completely ignoring his hospitality. "Tell me everything you know about the situation with the first-year students. Right this minute!" She clapped her hands directly in front of Leon's face, the sharp sound deliberately insulting, not even acknowledging the refreshment he'd just poured.

"You want information about the first-years?" Leon offered mildly, keeping his expression neutral. "I'm sure you know considerably more than I do about such things. You're much better connected to the gossip networks."

Of course, this was a blatant lie—he had Luxion and his extensive information-gathering capabilities at his disposal. Furthermore, recently Olivia had been spending substantial time with the Redgrave daughter, which meant Leon was actually remarkably well-informed about first-year affairs through multiple channels.

"Uh, okay, well," Leon offered with a theatrical sigh, pretending to think. "I've heard that two of the most desirable girls, Milly and Jessica, already found partners. Pretty disappointing for the rest of us, honestly. They were both genuinely good catches, the sort you'd actually want to marry."

"Who cares about that?" Jenna scoffed dismissively, waving away his words. "You know that Marie girl, right? And recently, your vassal Olivia has been acting really close with Duke Redgrave's daughter. What do you know about that?"

Leon made a deliberately confused face, as though the question itself was inappropriate. "What makes you think I would participate in gossip about people of significantly higher standing than myself? That seems unwise."

"Are you a complete imbecile?" she sneered, her face twisting with contempt. "Assuming nothing catastrophic and unforeseen happens, Crown Prince Julius will eventually succeed to the throne! You're in his grade! If you keep on his good side now, you'll have an incredibly promising future ahead of you. Got it? On the other hand, if you do anything to upset him or his faction, it's all over for you and our entire family."

"Hmm," was all Leon replied, the noncommittal sound clearly infuriating her further.

"Ugh, you men are absolutely impossible!" she huffed in exasperation as she stood up abruptly, grabbing her attendant's hand roughly as she pulled him bodily out of the dormitory room, her footsteps stomping loudly enough to echo down the corridor.

"..."

"..."

The silence stretched for a long moment.

"Well, that was certainly something," a confident, distinctly feminine voice suddenly interjected from Leon's left side.

It was Mégane, the very person who had 'stealthily' entered right after Daniel and Raymond had left the room earlier. She was now sitting casually beside him on the couch, her legs crossed with an air of practised regality.

"Mégane, why are you here?" Leon asked with resignation. "Shouldn't you be stuck attending all of your remedial classes for the foreseeable future? I was told your schedule was completely packed."

This was Mégane Fou Bellefleur, the daughter of Margot Fou Bellefleur. She had brazenly skipped the entire first part of the first term to go on an unsanctioned adventure, which had actually resulted in her gaining the formal title of baronetess through combat achievements. Still, due to her extended absence from the academy, she had been very publicly and very loudly chastised by her own mother in front of the thirty academy students who had participated in the dungeon raid—this dramatic dressing-down occurring immediately after Mégane had cheerfully proposed becoming his vassal knight and mistress.

Though this public humiliation hadn't actually stopped Margot from officially processing the vassalage papers anyway, making Mégane legally Leon's

responsibility. Margot had congratulated him with obvious sarcasm that Mégane was his headache now, seeming relieved to pass the burden along.

Then a loud banging had come from the door, and it had opened to reveal one of their professors angrily stomping inside, face red with fury.

Leon looked to his side to find Mégane mysteriously gone from the couch, but he just sighed wearily as he reinforced his body with a touch of magical enhancement. Reaching over the backrest of the couch, he grabbed the supposedly hiding Mégane by her collar, lifting her bodily and placing her back down on the cushions. She smiled awkwardly and offered a weak "Hi" to the furious professor now looming over them both.

As Mégane was unceremoniously dragged by the ear out of the door by the professor, practically lifted off her feet, Luxion materialised in the air beside Leon.

"Master, everyone is coming this way, and they are demonstrably dru—"

Slam. The door burst open again with tremendous force. Leon couldn't help but sigh deeply, wondering what he'd done to deserve this constant chaos.

"Leon!" It was Olivia's voice, though notably slurred. She was flanked by both Angelica and Sella, and all of their group's guardian spirits were arrayed behind them in an impressive display—even his two new celestial guardian spirits, Ria and Art, were present. "You were mean to me this morning, really mean, so you absolutely have to give us more booze to make up for it—"

Leon quickly gestured frantically to both Durga and Melt to close the door immediately, desperately not wanting to create a scandal that would spread throughout the academy by morning.

"Angelica and I right here are currently women scorned!" Olivia declared dramatically, swaying dangerously. "Scorned, Leon! And you shall pamper us tonight to make amends!"

An equally inebriated Angelica stood beside her, swaying precariously as her guardian spirit Britomart kept her physically steady, preventing her from toppling over entirely. Smartly, Luxion had already disappeared from sight, clearly wanting no part of whatever was about to unfold.

"*Coward*," Leon whispered towards where his AI partner had been floating, though whether Luxion received the mental accusation or not was unclear.

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After a night of them drinking—during which Angelica had oscillated between angry ranting about Julius and Marie, melancholy crying into Britomart's shoulder, and finally peaceful drowsiness—Leon was finally able to put everyone to rest.

He adjusted the blanket over Angelica's shoulders, where she'd passed out on his guest bed, her guardian spirit Britomart sleeping beside her.

Leon picked up Olivia from where she lay on the couch and carried her to the room where all her guardian spirits had already slept due to the alcohol.

He pulled the blanket up over her shoulders, tucking it in gently, and for a moment just... looked at her.

Her face was peaceful in sleep, all the manic energy and theatrical anger smoothed away, leaving only the girl who'd died beside him in another life. The companion who'd spent those final weeks playing games with him, who'd coincidentally been reborn in this strange world, who'd found him again despite all odds.

Leon tucked a stray strand behind her ear.

"When I've properly moved past them," he said softly, his voice barely above a whisper in the quiet room, speaking to her sleeping form with words he couldn't quite manage to say whilst she was awake, "when I can look at Durga and Melt and Ria and Art without seeing the faces of people I failed, when I've finally let go of a past that's already eighteen years gone... I'll take your feelings seriously. Properly seriously. The way you deserve."

Leon stood up as he gently closed the door behind him.

Just as darkness enveloped the room, one eye peered open under the bright moonlight through the window.

"Stupid Leon," Olivia harumphed, as she pulled the blanket tighter to her body, scooting closer towards Sella, as she easily returned to slumber, a peaceful smile adorning her face.

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End

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