

## Fate/Knights of the Heroic Throne

**Disclaimer:** This story is set in an alternate universe that diverges from established Star Wars lore. I'm not confident enough to follow Star Wars lore one-to-one, but I'll do my best to respect both Legends and canon where possible. Some timelines and characters have been adjusted to either fit a narrative or just for the sake of it. Shirou Emiya (former Counter Guardian EMIYA) and Arturia Pendragon (former Saber Alter) won't be curbstomping Jedi and Sith—they're both powerful, respectively—but both Jedi and Sith could also reach heights that could rival legends.

Chapter Intro

Human order: Restored.

History: Preserved.

But what of the ones who made it possible?

Heroic Spirits—echoes of legends, bound to vessels, fated to fade without remembrance.

But a wish was made.

One last miracle from humanity's saviour—  
that her fallen companions might live once more.

**Story Starts**

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**Chapter 5 -**

**One Must Not**

**Feed Strays After Hours**

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A twitch. A breath. The faint hiss of oil answered him.

*Twitch.* Shirou Emiya—former Counter Guardian, once a hound of Alaya, one among the many heroes of Chaldea, stood before the burner hub, a

customised rectangular pan balanced in one hand, long wooden chopsticks in the other. The weight of the pan felt reassuring against his palm; its warmth radiated through the handle like a heartbeat beneath wood and steel.

*Twitch.* A flick of the wrist, measured, unhurried. Under his guidance, the omelette folded neatly upon itself, each motion clean and deliberate, another golden layer settling into place. Steam rose in whispered columns, carrying the rich, earthy perfume of eggs kissed by oil—deepened by the faint brine of broth made from reconstituted dried seaweed, a humble echo of the traditional Japanese dashi. The burner hub murmured beneath it all—a bright, metallic hiss tempered by a hollow, bell-like undertone, like an engine's breath softened by flame.

*Twitch.* He caught up a small, bunched piece of flimsi soaked in oil and swept it across the pan in light, circular strokes. The metal sang softly where it met the fat, a note of work and warmth. He pushed the rolled omelette forward with practised precision, spread another veil of oil across the cleared space, and set the flimsi back into its bowl.

*Twitch.* Another pour followed. The beaten egg spread in a thin, pale layer, its edges trembling before catching in the heat. He lifted the roll just enough to let the liquid slip beneath, piercing the bubbles that swelled with trapped steam, before starting the process all over again.

"Shirou?"

*Twitch.*

"Shirou?"

"Yes, Padmé?" he said, releasing a long, measured sigh, trying to hide the flicker of irritation he'd been feeling this morning.

"Do you need any help?" she asked, her dark eyes following the rolled golden egg as he flipped it with practised ease, the surface gleaming with a faint sheen of oil that caught the kitchen's warm lighting.

"Hey, Shirou, how long before breakfast? We're already hungry," the familiar, melodious voice of Tsabin drifted from behind him—he didn't need to turn, for she was almost certainly standing at the access door to the dining area. Her tone carried that teasing impatience over genuine hunger he'd somehow grown used to each morning.

*Twitch.* He gently laid the rolled egg into the wooden mat, its rough weave scratching softly against his fingertips as he enclosed the warm cylinder within, pressing and shaping it into a uniform form.

"Shirou, I think you need more potassium. Your eye has been twitching for the past twenty seconds," Padmé said, worry threading her voice as she leaned closer until he caught the subtle fragrance of the soap she favoured—floral and understated—a reminder of his early morning pickup at the Palace Plaza before a supply run, the scent of dew in the air mirroring her own. Her breath warmed his cheek as she studied his face with disarming focus.

"Shirou, our comrades require nourishment; one must hasten—Su Yan and Mara have yet to partake in anything since yesterday afternoon." Arturia's imperious tone carried cleanly from the dining area of the restaurant, each word crisp and precisely enunciated, cutting through the kitchen's ambient sounds like a blade through silk.

*Twitch.* 'One must not feed strays after hours,' Shirou thought, bitterly amused. He let the breath out through his nose, then turned to face Padmé properly. "If you could help me push that cart and start setting the table, that would be helpful. And thank you for the concern, but I think I'm fine."

Padmé's expression stayed sceptical, her brow furrowing as if weighing whether to press the matter or not. "If you're sure," she said at last, choosing

instead to let it go as she moved to the wheeled cart. The metal rattled softly beneath her hands, the sound pairing with the clink of ceramic and the gentle slosh of soup beneath its lid.

The cart bore the morning's fare: a carefully arranged selection of vegetable side dishes in small porcelain bowls, colours bright and inviting; various pickles gleaming with vinegar; grilled fish with skin still crackling from the heat; miso sending up wisps of savoury steam; and a large food warmer filled with perfectly seasoned rice, each grain distinct and glistening. Earthy, salty, sweet, and umami aromas rose in a quiet symphony—traditional Japanese breakfast fare, prepared with meticulous care.

"Yes, and thank you, I'll follow shortly with the eggs," he said, turning back to retrieve the bamboo-wrapped cylinder, its warmth pulsing through the woven fibres into his palms.

Shirou set all three shaped omelettes on a wooden board, aligning the trio with care. He sliced them into equal portions and arrayed the pieces, cut-side up—each delicate layer still moist and glistening—on a rectangular ceramic plate. Then, as always, he cleared everything—board, mat, knife, and pan—into the autowasher, his motions fluid, unthinking, and sure.

By the time he stepped toward the dining area, the warm murmur of conversation and the gentle clink of chopsticks against ceramic bowls told him that everyone had already started with their meal. The rich aroma of miso and grilled fish mingled with satisfied sighs of appreciation.

"...!"

Shirou paused mid-stride as something tugged at the back of his mind—a familiar weight of responsibility that made his chest tighten with mild panic. *Arturia's breakfast*. He placed the plate of rolled omelettes carefully on the polished bar counter, the ceramic making a soft tap against the wood.

"Sasha, could you take this? I forgot something rather important," Shirou asked, his voice carrying a note of sheepish urgency as he addressed the quietest—relatively speaking—member of Padmé's entourage. She sat nearest to the counter, her dark hair catching the morning light filtering through the windows.

Sasha glanced up from her bowl, steam still rising from the amber broth, and took one last deliberate sip of the miso soup. The liquid warmed her throat as she savoured the salty, earthy depth before setting the bowl down with a gentle clink. She stood gracefully, her movements unhurried despite Shirou's evident haste.

Shirou was already turning back toward the kitchen, his mind focused on the oversight. Approaching the food warmer with quick, purposeful steps, he could feel the residual heat radiating from its surface.

He opened the plasteel-framed glass door, releasing a fresh wave of savoury steam, and carefully extracted a plate stacked high with Arturia's favourite indulgent offerings: glistening sausages with their casings slightly split from cooking, strips of bacon still crackling faintly, thick slices of ham with caramelised edges, and roasted mushrooms that glistened with rendered fat and herbs.

Quickly returning to the dining area, he slipped into the empty seat between Padmé—who presided at the head of the table as if she were the matriarch of the house—and Tsabin, the rice warmer settling neatly on the cart Padmé had rolled in, pulling it towards his right side for easy access. The hot platter found its place at the centre, and spoons, forks, and chopsticks immediately reached for the glistening offerings—save for one hand.

"Careful, that plate's hot," Shirou warned.

For a moment, Tsabin froze—caught halfway between sense and mischief—as she shot Shirou a challenging quirk of her brow. Her fingers

moved again, inching towards the gleaming ceramic, taking his warning as a challenge.

Shirou's eyes followed the motion, half amused, as if he were watching a car crash about to happen—well, speeder wreck if he puts it into context. She covered over the platter's glossy surface, reaching not for the food but for the heated ceramic instead.

She yanked her hand back with a sharp hiss, fingertips flying to her lips as her eyes crinkled with mischief. She earned a chorus of snorts from the table as if this were typical behaviour for her.

"I thought it wouldn't be too hot since you brought it in bare-handed," she said, her tongue darting out in mock defiance.

*Twitch.*

"You're the sort who'd press the 'Do Not Touch' button just to see what happens," he said to Tsbin, half a smile ghosting across his face—earning an affirmative hum from his right.

His gaze swept the table—platters crowding every available surface, steam rising from bowls, the gentle clink of utensils against ceramic like a soft percussion beneath the chatter.

Five days. Five days since this invasion had begun, with Padmé and her retinue appearing for breakfast, dinner, sometimes both. They had claimed the private corners of the restaurant as if by right: lingering in the kitchen during restaurant hours, transforming the rooftop garden into their meeting space, even sprawling across the small studio apartment above as though it were common ground.

The memory of feeding them after hours that first night flickered through his mind—a moment of weakness that had snowballed into a full-scale

occupation. He'd even whipped out some late-night hotpot to go with the crate of bottled wine Arturia had produced.

It didn't help that they had even discovered the bath upstairs—a spacious area customised to his Japanese ideals as a kind of makeshift onsen. The sound of running water and muffled voices drifting down through the floorboards had become a nightly soundtrack.

Steam carried hints of lavender bath salts he'd never purchased, yet somehow they appeared in his supplies. Their bath almost got daily use from the retinue of reformists, Arturia joining them for some 'naked friendship'—a term she'd probably picked up from Ritsuka or one of the many Japanese Servants in Chaldea.

Arturia extended her empty chawan towards him, the gesture as natural as breathing, her pale fingers steady despite the way her golden eyes tracked the conversations around them with quiet interest. Around them, the conversation flowed like a gentle current—snippets of schedules, campaigning for grassroots support, and strategy blending with the soft clink of utensils against ceramic, underscored by the day's news playing live in the background through the holoscreen.

Seven extra mouths to feed, seven more plates to wash—or rather, seven more to be loaded into the autowasher.

While he was the one who offered breakfast the first night they stayed, the one who had encouraged all of this chaos was none other than his partner, who had taken an immediate and inexplicable liking to the reformist group and continuously invited them after hours for some libation—her golden eyes lighting up whenever Padmé's entourage arrived.

Anyone who stayed over for breakfast earned an extension of the invitation to those who hadn't stayed the night as well, Arturia's sense of hospitality proving as relentless as her former reign. Still, Shirou admitted with a mixture

of resignation and genuine warmth, the place felt livelier these days—even if his workload had increased and the constant hum of voices had replaced the restaurant's former quiet evenings.

Like clockwork, he wordlessly took the empty chawan from Arturia's fingers, the ceramic still warm from the rice it had held. The familiar weight of it in his palm brought a strange comfort as he filled it high with a neat, perfectly shaped mound of rice—each grain catching the overhead light—before handing it back to her still-outstretched hand. A soft, almost melodic sound of gratitude followed the exchange, the kind of contented murmur that spoke of genuine appreciation rather than mere politeness.

He couldn't help but trace this particular brand of chaos back to where it had all begun, his memory picking through the threads like unravelling a complex weave.

His gaze swept across the table and beyond, past the gentle steam rising from countless dishes. He recalled with vivid clarity the sight of them everywhere—lounging in the restaurant's corners with the easy confidence of regular patrons; turning the rooftop garden into a makeshift command centre; drifting through his once-pristine kitchen with casual familiarity; their enthusiastic use of the upstairs bath—no doubt increasing the utilities—and even invading the small studio apartment above with notebooks and datapads scattered across every surface. All of it was done with the languid confidence of well-fed cats that had claimed their territory and deemed it satisfactory.

*'Truly, you shouldn't feed strays after hours.'*

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*Five days ago, the night Tsabin organised a private event at The Empty Pantry...*

Tsabin Vareli—or rather *Serin* for the night—stood alongside Padmé at the back entrance of *The Empty Pantry*, the cool morning air brushing over her skin and making her shiver as a sudden gust of wind stirred her cloak.

Mr Emiya flanked Padmé's other side, his quiet presence a reassuring anchor amidst the controlled chaos of departure. The three formed an impromptu receiving line, their courteous voices blending in the soft rhythm of farewells and gratitude as guests trickled out in pairs and clusters, some lingering for one last word before stepping into the pre-dawn dark.

She inwardly winced, realising she had once again thought *Padmé* instead of *Liora*. If she ever slipped aloud, she would never hear the end of it.

Inside, Tarin and Veyra worked with the brisk precision of professionals long past exhaustion, packing the evening's bounty into gleaming plastoid containers. Each one was sealed, labelled, and arranged neatly across a repurposed prep table now stationed by the exit.

The entire setup resembled a miniature relief operation—a quiet, orderly dance of motion and purpose.

Sasha—*Ryn* for the night—stood sentinel beside the neat rows, her datapad casting a steady white glow over the steel counter. Every departing guest paused at her station, datapads chirping softly as they connected. The bureaucratic hum of liability waivers ensured that no complaint could reach The Empty Pantry if improperly stored, reheated leftovers turned against the eater later.

Meanwhile, Nive and Arturia managed the last lingering guests, trading light conversation while clearing tables and setting the dining area back to its tidy, peaceful state.

"Ah, Mr Emiya!"

The cheerful greeting rang through the cool air, followed by the firm, measured steps of Sio Bibble and the Head of the Merchant Guild, Cedor Parnell, emerged from The Empty Pantry's warm glow. The governor's voice carried that precise timbre of satisfaction that came after good food, good drink, and the pleasure of being seen enjoying both.

Tsabin noted, not without irritation, how he greeted Emiya alone, deliberately excluding her and Liora from his attention.

Sio Bibble extended his hand—palm angled upward in a consciously open gesture that projected warmth without conceding authority. To Tsabin, well-versed in Naboo's political theatre, the gesture was almost artful in its calculation.

In his other hand, Bibble carried two steaming plastoid containers, their lids fogged and venting tiny tendrils of heat that curled like pale smoke against the morning chill. The sight was faintly absurd—the dignified governor of Theed clutching takeaway boxes like a man guarding treasure.

Emiya accepted the handshake with his usual calm composure, unhurried but firm.

"Excellent evening," Bibble declared with the self-satisfaction of one well entertained. "The food was remarkable—unique, in fact! And all this arranged at the last minute?"

His praise sounded genuine enough, though Tsabin could see the deliberate way his gaze slid past both her and Liora—two women rendered invisible through the governor's lens.

"Yes, Governor," Shirou replied evenly. "Though Arturia and I had considerable help from Serin, Liora, and their team." His polite deflection was effortless—warm, professional, and quietly corrective. His amber eyes briefly

met theirs—a small, deliberate moment of acknowledgement that the governor had so pointedly withheld.

*'At least someone remembers to use the aliases,'* Tsabin thought wryly, humour tinged with complaint. Emiya switched between real and false names as naturally as breathing, while she still stumbled over them—even in her own head.

Tsabin felt the familiar spark of irritation at Sio Bibble's predictable behaviour. Like clockwork, the governor's expression shifted as his gaze swept over them. He ignored Padmé entirely, as if she were invisible, while offering Tsabin nothing more than a perfunctory nod—neutral at best, coldly dismissive at worst. The contrast with his effusive warmth toward Emiya was stark enough to be almost comical.

"Oh, and modest as well," Bibble declared with theatrical appreciation, his jubilant expression returning full force now that his attention was safely focused away from the women.

"My office will undoubtedly be a frequent customer if the quality of the food persists," Bibble declared with theatrical appreciation. "I'm sure my wife will love what I'm bringing home tonight—though she'll probably taste it in the morning." He released Shirou's hand before giving him two hearty thumps on the shoulders, the gesture almost paternal in its approval.

"Where are my manners?" Bibble asked rhetorically, his voice swelling with self-importance.

Tsabin's lips twitched at the predictable display, her thoughts laced with dry irritation. *'Yeah, where indeed are your manners?'*

"This is Cedor Parnell—Head of the Merchant Guild of Naboo," he continued, turning with a flourish to introduce the broad-shouldered man who had

accompanied him. Parnell's sun-browned skin and dark auburn hair, streaked with early grey, caught the faint lamplight as he stepped forward.

Tsabin knew from his record that he was well into his sixties, though careful gene and skin therapies kept him looking closer to his mid-forties. Anyone with enough credits could afford rejuvenation treatments to preserve youth—even the elderly governor of Theed, whose long face, neatly trimmed grey-white beard, sharp blue-grey eyes, and swept-back silver hair made him look remarkably spry. Bibble was scarcely a decade older than Parnell, and the whitening of their hair, Serin mused, was likely more the result of stress than time—a professional hazard shared by men in power.

Parnell's square jaw and neatly kept beard lent him the practical solidity of a craftsman rather than the polish of a court official. The forest-green and bronze of his guild robes complemented his colouring, and unlike Bibble's performative warmth, his manner seemed genuinely open. He inclined his head politely toward both Liora and Serin before turning to Shirou, his gesture marked by the kind of natural respect the governor always seemed to lack.

Bibble, beaming with renewed enthusiasm now that the attention had safely returned to male company, clapped his hands together. "Cedor, this is Shirou Emiya, co-owner of this lovely establishment. He has been a gracious host and entertained me thoroughly this evening."

Parnell extended his arm in greeting, his own plastoid container balanced carefully in the other hand. Emiya accepted the handshake with calm precision; as Tsabin had noticed earlier, he spoke with the effortless composure of someone long accustomed to those in power—courteous without ever being deferential.

"He has expressed an interest in opening a stall by our river market as well," Bibble added with enthusiasm, giving Emiya two more thumps on the shoulder, "and I think their business would be an excellent addition to our Festival of the Merchant's Boon, don't you think?"

"Oh, is this true? Are you planning on hiring additional staff?" Parnell asked, his brown eyes keen with the interest of a man who understood the practicalities of business expansion.

"Yes, Mr Parnell, we're planning to expand operations to handle deliveries, and we do need more staff so we can start having regular rest days. It'll also let us take advantage of new opportunities, just as our generous sponsor Tessari Nyl suggested," Shirou replied smoothly. His tone remained conversational—professional without a hint of obsequiousness. "In fact, our first batch of interviews happens tomorrow."

"Ah, Tessari Nyl—how is that crafty old schemer?" Parnell asked with genuine fondness, reaching for his datapad. He attempted to balance the device on his already-occupied left hand, the containers threatening to slip, but Shirou smoothly offered to hold them while Parnell navigated his datapad.

"I'm sure she and Balron are enjoying their time on Cantonica; it's barely been a month since their last visit," Emiya said conversationally, reaching for his own datapad.

"Here—you can reach me through my assistant. I'm sure we can arrange a booth at the festival; just let us know when you'd like to open a stall at the river market. More jobs and more commerce are always welcome," Parnell said. He and Sio exchanged a satisfied nod as Emiya gently tapped his device against Parnell's to receive the contact details.

"It's already early morning, Mr Emiya," Sio observed, glancing at the chrono on his device before looking up at the starry sky, while Emiya returned the plastoid containers to the guild head. "Give my regards to both Balron and Tessari. My wife would love to see her cousin and his wife now and then. Thank you for the lovely evening."

Parnell mirrored his goodbyes with easy warmth, and both men headed toward the front of the establishment where a sleek speeder waited on the

pavement. But not before Sio Bibble shot Padmé one final icy stare, pointedly ignoring Tsabin altogether.

As the telltale whine of the speeder faded into the distance, Shirou turned to them with a slightly raised eyebrow, his expression wry. "It looks like he really doesn't like you, Liora—and only barely tolerates you, Serin."

Padmé could only manage a pained yet exhausted sigh, the weight of the evening's diplomatic tightrope walk evident in the slump of her shoulders. Tsabin shrugged with deliberate nonchalance, though her eyes sparkled with mischief. "Well, you could drop the aliases now—that was the last of the guests. And it's quite a long story."

For the second time this very early morning, another jubilant voice called out through the night air. "Shirou!" Arturia appeared, clutching a case of bottled wines as if it weighed nothing, flanked by Su Yan, whose own cheeks bore the telltale flush of an evening well-spent. "The night is still young; let us partake in some more libations and forge bonds of friendship!"

Tsabin couldn't help but grin at the sight of Arturia, whose normally composed demeanour had been softened by the evening's festivities. A delicate shade of pink coloured the blonde woman's cheeks—she had clearly accepted several offered drinks throughout the night, as had most of the hosts. After all, this event hadn't been merely a night of revelry but also a calculated mixer designed to connect their staff with influential members of the merchant guild.

"Hey! I don't mind that at all," Tsabin declared with enthusiasm—the prospect of extending the evening suddenly seemed far more appealing than ending it on Sio Bibble's particular sour note.

"I'm sure it'll be fun." Without waiting for objections, she grabbed Padmé's hand with playful determination. She tugged Padmé along, following Arturia and the rest of the girls toward their upper-garden retreat—leaving Shirou standing there without even the opportunity to put his two credits in.

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With everyone still draped in their restaurant uniforms—though thankfully freed from the confines of their thigh-highs—they had gathered around a heavy, weathered wooden table. The chairs, hastily borrowed from the dining area downstairs, creaked softly under their weight as they settled into the evening's reprieve. The cool night air carried the faint scent of millaflower from the rooftop garden's planters, mingling with the rich aromas wafting from Emiya's culinary offerings.

Eirtama, cradling a bottle of chilled Nabooan white wine like a precious treasure, extended her long, slender arms with practised grace. Her slim fingers held the bottle's base with an almost lazy elegance as she poured generous helpings into each glass, the pale liquid catching the garden's ambient lighting. The soft clink of glass against glass punctuated the gentle evening breeze.

Her vivid red braids had been released from their earlier restraints, now cascading freely over her shoulders in waves that shimmered with rich lustre under the overhead lights. Her clear blue eyes, bright but tempered with the day's accumulated exhaustion, shifted towards the compact cryocooler as she methodically wedged the cork back into the emptied bottle.

Setting the spent bottle on the crate it came in, beside the humming cryocooler, she retrieved a bottle opener with practised efficiency and uncorked another bottle of white. Condensation immediately began forming delicate beads across the glass surface. The temperature differential created tiny rivulets that caught the light like scattered diamonds.

"Ey, Sasha, how is it?" Eirtama's voice carried a note of genuine curiosity as she directed her attention towards her companion.

Sasha sat with one hand threading through her nearly black, straight hair, attempting to tame the silken strands that the evening's gentle breeze kept

sweeping across her face. The glossy locks seemed to have a mind of their own, catching and reflecting the garden's soft illumination. In her other hand, she cradled a small ceramic bowl—no larger than her palm—tipped delicately towards her pink lips as she savoured careful sips of the white, aromatic broth within.

Emiya, ever the consummate host despite his quietly weary demeanour, had just finished presenting his centrepiece: a wide, shallow pot filled with milky white broth that steamed invitingly in the cool air. He'd referred to it as paitan. The surface of the soup shimmered with emulsified protein and fat, creating an almost pearlescent quality that spoke to hours of rolling boil—well, that was according to Emiya.

Arranged around the communal pot with artistic precision were an array of vegetables—crisp greens and earthy mushrooms that promised textural contrast—alongside both processed and fresh meats that seemed to beckon from their carefully composed positions.

"Whoa, this is so good," Sasha breathed, setting her bowl down with a soft ceramic *clink* against the wooden table's surface. Her movements were fluid as she gathered her rebellious hair, securing it with an elastic band that had been wrapped around her slender wrist.

The action transformed her face, revealing the elegant line of her neck and the determined set of her jawline as she smacked her lips in appreciation.

"It's pretty rich and velvety—" She paused to take a considered sip of her wine, the pale liquid catching the light as it touched her lips. "—and it works surprisingly well with the wine. The acidity cuts through the richness beautifully."

The endorsement seemed to unlock something in the group's collective restraint. Tabin reached for the ladle, its metal handle still warm from the steam, and served herself a modest portion of the bubbling soup. She

positioned the ladle's handle towards Padmé—a subtle invitation that her closest friend recognised immediately, taking it as her cue to serve herself a portion. The gesture rippled around the table as everyone else followed suit, creating a comfortable rhythm of sharing and anticipation.

With deliberate care, Tsabin selected a silver fork and pierced a piece of pale white flesh. Tip-yip breast, she surmised, her brow crinkling slightly in concentration as she examined the meat's delicate texture. The protein looked perfectly cooked—tender and inviting without being overdone.

Beside the communal pot, Emiya had arranged three ceramic jars, each accompanied by its own small serving utensil. The containers seemed to promise different flavour journeys, their glazed surfaces reflecting the garden's gentle lighting.

The first, he'd explained with characteristic understatement, contained ponzu—a savoury and sour sauce designed for general purposes, its relatively light composition meant to enhance rather than overwhelm.

The second jar held what appeared to be a heavier sesame sauce, dark, creamy, and glossy, fragrant with garlic, herbs, and the deep, funky notes of fermented chilli paste that made Tsabin's nose tingle from this close.

The third jar, however, had captured her attention completely. According to Emiya's careful explanation, it contained citrus koushou—a potent blend of fermented citrus peels and chillies that promised surprising power despite its deceptively fresh, almost floral aroma. His warning that 'less is more' had been delivered with the kind of gentle authority that came from experience, accompanied by a slight smile that suggested he'd seen someone else learn that particular lesson.

Following Emiya's enthusiastic recommendation that the citrus would pair exceptionally well with the tip-yip, Tsabin reached for the tiny ceramic spoon. The utensil felt almost delicate in her fingers as she carefully portioned a small

amount of the bright green condiment, its vibrant colour promising intensity. She dabbed it precisely onto the top of her selected piece of meat, watching as the paste clung to the protein's surface like a verdant crown.

The first bite was nothing short of revelatory. As her teeth sank through the tender meat, bright, sharp, citrusy notes exploded across her palate with an intensity that made her eyes flutter closed involuntarily. The fermented citrus brought layers of complexity—salty and slightly funky—while the chilli had little heat, yet it seemed to awaken every taste bud simultaneously as her mouth salivated. A soft, involuntary squeal escaped her throat, the sound somewhere between surprise and pure pleasure.

Without conscious thought, she followed the bite with a sip of the rich, velvety broth. The contrast was sublime—the paitan's creamy richness providing a luxurious backdrop that somehow made the citrus condiment's brightness even more pronounced. A pleasurable moan, deeper and more resonant than her initial squeal, escaped her lips before she could stop it.

"You like it that much, huh?" The amused voice from above made Tabin freeze mid-chew, her eyes snapping open to discover the entire table's attention focused squarely on her. The realisation hit her like cold water—she'd been so lost in the sensory experience that she'd completely forgotten her audience.

Padmé's expression was caught between fond exasperation and barely contained laughter, her warm brown eyes dancing with mirth. Eirtama had paused mid-pour, the wine bottle suspended in her elegant fingers as her clear blue eyes sparkled with undisguised amusement. Sasha's steady hazel gaze held a mixture of curiosity and entertainment, while her lips curved in the slightest hint of a knowing smile.

Mara raised an eyebrow; her light-amber eyes—usually bright and warm—now appraising. Her voluminous blonde locks were tied into a messy

bun. The new girl, Rabbine, who could pass as a little sister to both Padmé and Mara, gave her an awkward smile.

Su Yan, however, had adopted what could only be described as a positively foxy expression, her golden-brown eyes alight with mischievous delight as she leaned forward with predatory interest. "That was quite the orgasmic moan, Tsabin," she teased, her voice carrying just enough volume to make the comparison unmistakable. "Which combination did you try? Because I absolutely want to experience whatever just transported you to another realm!"

"Judging from the only missing piece in the hot pot and the small bits of green floating in her bowl, it was the tip-yip breast with a bit of citrus koushou," came the familiar voice from directly above her head, tinged with gentle amusement. Tsabin jerked her head back sharply to locate the source, the sudden movement sending a shock of awareness through her neck muscles.

There, standing behind her chair with an expression of quiet satisfaction, was Emiya—his silver-grey eyes holding that particular blend of warmth and subtle humour that seemed to be his default setting.

Recognising the potential for collision between her rapidly tilting head and the chair's unforgiving backrest, Emiya smoothly placed his palm between her skull and the wooden surface, his reflexes speaking to the kind of spatial awareness typical of people who work in the service industry.

Arching an eyebrow in her direction, Emiya withdrew his palm from behind her skull as he settled into the vacant chair next to her, reaching for a pair of tongs. He selected another portion of the breast meat, held it aloft, and directed it towards Padmé, saying, "Here, let's finish the tip-yip breast; otherwise, it'll just overcook and become unpleasant. While I do recommend the koushou for the breast, any of the condiments will work as well."

With her delicate hands, Padmé raised her bowl, meeting the piece of meat halfway. He repeated the same cycle for each of the girls, even offering Tsabin another round, though she noticed him place one of the pieces in the empty bowl for Arturia.

"Ei, Arturia! Come join, come join," Su Yan enthusiastically called out, her voice cutting through the evening air with genuine warmth as Padmé, Mara, and Eirtama leaned in closer to catch every word of Rabbine's continuation of her animated recounting of her experiences in Coruscant—which had been momentarily interrupted by Tsabin's earlier moan. The younger woman was particularly vivid when describing her time at the University of Coruscant, her amber-gold eyes sparkling with remembered excitement as she gestured expressively.

Craning her neck, Tsabin caught sight of the blonde emerging from their studio apartment, no longer bound by the crisp lines of her black-and-white service uniform. Instead, Arturia had changed into something far more casual: short boxer shorts that revealed the lean musculature of her legs, and a simple white camisole that clung softly to her petite frame.

The moonlight seemed to seek her out deliberately, Tsabin mused with a mixture of admiration. Arturia's pale skin—that distinctive white with its faint grey undertone—caught the lunar glow and transformed her into something almost otherworldly. She moved with that characteristic measured grace, but in the silvery light, she appeared less like the composed restaurant waitress they all knew and more like some ethereal spectre who had wandered out of an old fairy tale.

But that ethereal impression shattered like morning frost as she dropped into the vacant spot next to Emiya, the movement fluid yet decisive. The way she draped her legs across his lap whilst declaring, "My limbs ache, Shirou, you will tend to my calves and feet," carried all the imperious authority of someone accustomed to being obeyed without question.

Tsabin nearly choked on her wine at the brazen display, the liquid catching in her throat as she witnessed the transformation from ethereal maiden to demanding noble in the space of a heartbeat. The casual intimacy of the gesture—those pale legs settling across Emiya's thighs as if it were the most natural thing in the world—sent an unexpected flutter through her chest that she couldn't quite name.

Emiya, without missing a beat, pushed her legs away with practised efficiency and said, "This is hardly the appropriate setting—thank you, Su Yan." He rebuked the petite, theorised, anthropomorphised sarlacc while thanking Su Yan, who immediately filled both Emiya and Arturia's glasses with wine, her golden-brown eyes dancing with barely suppressed amusement at the domestic theatre unfolding before them.

The rebuke was delivered with such matter-of-fact calm that Tsabin found herself studying Emiya's profile in the moonlight, noting the way his silver-grey eyes held that particular brand of long-suffering patience that spoke of countless similar exchanges. There was something almost endearing about his resigned composure, like a man who had grown accustomed to weathering storms of noble petulance.

Tsabin could feel a sudden pressure building behind her temples as she thought about Emiya's earlier explanation of some of Arturia's fans' theories about her bottomless stomach. She chalked it up to the day's tiredness and the potent vintage Su Yan kept pouring, watching as Arturia puffed her cheeks into a pout that transformed her regal features into something almost childishly endearing.

The moonlight caught the slight flush across Arturia's pale cheeks, whether from wine or indignation, Tsabin couldn't tell. But there was something utterly captivating about the way Arturia could shift so seamlessly between imperial authority and petulant charm, her golden eyes flashing with wounded pride even as her lower lip jutted out in obvious displeasure.

"I could give you a massage before we sleep," Emiya acquiesced, not looking at Arturia directly, his voice carrying that particular tone of someone who had learned when to pick his battles. The words hung in the warm night air as Tsabin took a large sip of the wine, feeling the rich liquid coat her throat as she watched their interplay between the couple with growing fascination.

Arturia's pout transformed instantly into a face of pure delight, her golden eyes lighting up with triumph as she nodded to herself in satisfaction, the movement causing her blonde hair to catch the moonlight like spun silk. Then, with the air of someone bestowing a great favour, she turned to address the table: "Do any of you want to have a massage before we sleep? Shirou here has amazing hands."

The casual offer dropped into the conversation like a stone into still water, sending ripples of surprise and intrigue across the gathered faces. Tsabin felt heat creep up her neck at the innocent yet loaded suggestion, her mind immediately conjuring images that had no business forming at a friendly dinner gathering.

Emiya, who began methodically dividing more of the aromatic meat and vegetables from the pot into individual bowls—the steam rising from the freshly served portions carrying the rich scents of herbs and spices—froze mid-motion at the sudden offer. His hands stilled over the communal dish, a piece of tender meat wedged between the teeth of a serving tong as if time itself had paused.

The silence stretched for a heartbeat, broken only by the gentle bubbling of the remaining broth and the distant sounds of the city settling into the night. Everyone appeared momentarily wrong-footed by the offer, with expressions ranging from startled surprise to dawning interest. However, Su Yan quirked an eyebrow at the suggestion, her amber-gold eyes sparkling with mischief as she leaned forward slightly, clearly intrigued by this unexpected development.

"What? Are you not staying the night?" Arturia continued, her tone suggesting that the answer should be evident to anyone with sense. "You might as well. Everyone here has already had at least a bottle of wine in them, and despite the automated flight capabilities of speeders, it is still not recommended; you'd need someone sober behind the control yoke of your vehicle." She punctuated her practical argument by downing her glass in one smooth motion, the pale column of her throat working as she swallowed.

Tsabin found herself mesmerised by the casual elegance of even that simple action, the way Arturia's head tilted back just enough to reveal the delicate line of her neck, the soft sound of satisfaction that escaped her lips as she set the empty glass down with a decisive click against the table.

"You might as well experience Shirou's full hospitality—ow!" The words cut off abruptly as Arturia's hand flew to her ear, her golden eyes widening in indignant surprise.

Shirou had reached over with lightning precision to flick her ear, the sharp sound of contact echoing in the sudden quiet. "Hey, why are you suddenly volunteering me?" he demanded, his amber eyes flashing with a mixture of exasperation and embarrassment. "Plus, I think it's quite an inappropriate offer, especially when we just met everyone today."

Emiya turned to face the rest of them, his expression shifting into formal contrition as he tilted his head in a proper bow. "I apologise for the inappropriate offer," he said with sincere regret colouring his voice. "If you do decide to stay the night, I can easily set up a sleeping bag and rest in the dining area. I wouldn't want to impose or make anyone uncomfortable."

The formal politeness was so at odds with the domestic bickering that had preceded it that Tsabin had to bite back a smile. There was something endearingly old-fashioned about his courtesy, the way he automatically took responsibility for his partner's boldness whilst offering practical solutions.

Su Yan suddenly interjected, her delicate hand raised as she gave a coy smile that transformed her already pretty features into something genuinely captivating. "Hey, I already know you lot through Uncle Balron," she said, her voice carrying a note of playful innocence that didn't quite match the spark in her golden-brown eyes. "Could I get that massage as well?"

The request hung in the air like incense, sweet and intoxicating. Tsabin watched Emiya's face go through a series of micro-expressions—surprise, realisation, and what looked distinctly like the dawning comprehension of a man who had suddenly found himself in much deeper waters than anticipated. Emiya palmed his face with the gesture of someone who could smell blood in the water, his shoulders sagging slightly as he no doubt contemplated how a simple evening had spiralled so completely out of his control.

Seizing the moment with predatory glee, Tsabin cut in, her voice rich with amusement as she leaned forward. "Ooh, if Su Yan is getting one, I want one as well." She turned her attention to Padmé with exaggerated concern, noting how her friend's shoulders carried the tension of their recent late nights. "Padmé, didn't you complain about pains due to our late nights? Go ask for one as well."

"Yes, but—" Padmé began, her cheeks flushing pink in the moonlight as she clearly struggled between propriety and the very real appeal of the offer.

"And about sleeping in the dining area," Tsabin continued, looking around the table with a grin that she knew made her look like a cat who had discovered an unguarded bowl of cream, "we are all grown adults here." She paused to take a deliberate sip of her wine, letting the moment stretch as Su Yan made her rounds, topping up dangerously low glasses with the dedication of someone enabling chaos. "I'm sure you'll be the perfect gentleman, right, Ms Arturia?"

The question was loaded with implications and mischief, and Tsabin felt a thrill of satisfaction at the way it seemed to catch everyone's attention, the various expressions around the table ranging from scandalised to intrigued.

"You may call me Arturia," came the immediate response, delivered with regal authority that brooked no argument. "You might as well call Shirou here by his first name as well. It would be going against our camaraderie if one of us is referred to with their family name whilst the others are not."

The declaration was made with such imperial certainty that Tsabin found herself nodding automatically, caught up in the force of personality that could transform a simple dinner party into a royal court with nothing more than tone and bearing.

Arturia then turned to Shirou with a grin that was pure mischief, her normally imperious golden eyes now alight with devilish intent that made Tsabin's pulse quicken with anticipation. "Regarding Shirou here being a gentleman," she continued, her voice carrying the silky promise of revelations to come, "I would have to disagree, as he definitely is a pervert."

The accusation landed like a bomb in the peaceful evening, causing several people to choke on their drinks whilst others leaned forward with undisguised interest.

"I am not!" Shirou protested, his voice cracking slightly with indignation as colour flooded his cheeks. The moonlight made his white hair seem to glow with ethereal light, even as his face burned with very human embarrassment.

"Yes, you are!" Arturia shot back with triumphant glee, clearly delighting in his discomfort as she settled more comfortably in her seat, preparing to elaborate on her scandalous claims.

"What are you even talking about?" Shirou demanded, crossing his arms defensively as he turned to face her fully, his amber eyes flashing with a

mixture of mortification and growing suspicion. "Is this payback for my earlier comments about the sarlacc thing?"

"I do not know what you're talking about," Arturia rebuked with such perfect innocence that it was obviously feigned, before turning to address their captive audience with the air of someone about to reveal state secrets. "Did you know Shirou designed this maid uniform, and it originally had a backless desi—"

The revelation was cut short as Shirou lunged forward with desperate speed, covering Arturia's mouth with his palm to prevent whatever mortifying detail she was about to share with their new friends. But Arturia, far from being silenced, simply bit down on his hand in retaliation, the action accompanied by a distinctly feline '*mokkyu*' sound that somehow managed to be both adorable and threatening.

Tsabin and everyone else watched with growing amusement as the pair descended into what could only be described as dignified bickering, their obvious affection for each other shining through even their most heated exchanges. Su Yan continued her dedicated mission of keeping everyone's glasses filled, clearly viewing the domestic entertainment as the perfect accompaniment to their already exceptional late-night feast.

The sight of them—Shirou's mortified protests muffled by Arturia's continued attempts to share embarrassing stories, her golden eyes sparkling with mischief even as she maintained her grip on his hand.

Tsabin found herself exchanging a meaningful glance with Padmé; the look lingered longer than strictly necessary, both women silently wondering whether their own carefully undefined closeness mirrored the affectionate chaos unfolding before them.

Sasha, their generally meek and quiet friend who'd transform into a passionate orator only when conversation topics arose, suddenly cleared her throat with surprising authority. The sound cut through the comfortable

atmosphere like a blade through silk. "Um, excuse me," she said, her voice carrying an unusual note of determination that made everyone pause mid-motion.

The bickering pair—who had been locked in their battle of wills, Arturia's teeth still threatening Shirou's captured hand whilst her golden eyes danced with unrepentant mischief—suddenly directed their full attention towards their friend. Their gazes, still gleaming with the remnants of their conflict, fixed on Sasha with laser-like intensity. The abrupt shift in focus was almost palpable, like stage lights suddenly swivelling to illuminate a new performer.

"What?" both asked in perfect unison, their voices creating an unconscious harmony that only served to emphasise their synchronicity.

"I've been curious since the start," Sasha began, her words measured but tinged with genuine interest, "what exactly is your relationship with each other?" She carefully avoided making direct eye contact with the pair, instead focusing on a spot somewhere between their shoulders, as though the intensity of their combined attention might overwhelm her usual composure.

The question hung in the air like incense, heavy and intoxicating. Tsabin could practically feel the collective held breath of their group, everyone leaning forward almost imperceptibly. This was something that everyone had probably wondered about from the moment they'd met the duo—the way they always referred to each other as 'partners'—a word vague enough to be businesslike yet suggestive of something romantic, especially given there was only one bed in their small apartment.

"Ooh, Sasha, are you interested?" Eirtama suddenly interjected with a teasing lilt that cut through the tension like a blade through butter, her clear blue eyes sparkling with mischief that rivalled Su Yan's and probably her own.

"Ah... no—" Sasha suddenly panicked, her previous composure cracking like ice under pressure as she stuttered her reply, colour flooding her cheeks in a

way that made her denial entirely unconvincing. Her hands fluttered nervously, seeking purchase on her glass.

But despite the sidebar drama, all eyes inevitably fell upon the couple at the centre of attention, drawn like moths to flame. The weight of collective curiosity settled over Shirou and Arturia like a blanket, expectant and warm.

"Oh, Shirou here is my partner!" Arturia declared with the kind of pride typically reserved for announcing military victories, her voice ringing clear and strong through the restaurant's intimate space.

"My comrade-in-arms," she continued, before her expression shifted back to that familiar mischievous cast, golden eyes glinting with dangerous amusement as she added, "Or were you asking if we are involved carnally? Well, I certainly wouldn't mind sharing such details. We did have that rather memorable night with Ritsuka in Shibuya—hey, ow!"

The sharp intake of breath around the table was audible, Su Yan nearly dropping her bottle of wine, whilst Tsabin felt her own eyebrows climbing towards her hairline in fascination and horror in equal measure.

Shirou, moving with the reflexes of someone long practised in damage control, suddenly held Arturia firmly by the ear, his grip gentle but unmistakably authoritative. His baritone voice cut through the air with the precision of a well-honed blade as he addressed their captivated audience: "If you're asking whether we are a couple in the traditional sense, Miss Sasha, that would be a rather complicated thing to explain without some context."

Arturia managed to slip free from Shirou's restraining fingers. She straightened with dignity intact, smoothing down her uniform with unconscious precision.

"Which is precisely why we have tonight's early morning revelry," she announced, her voice carrying the authority of someone accustomed to

addressing troops before battle. "We are now comrades in arms, having fought through gruelling service together and entertained guests as one united front."

Rising to her feet with ceremonial gravity, Arturia lifted her glass towards the ceiling, the liquid within catching the light like liquid amber. Her voice carried across the space with regal authority: "As we are now comrades bound by shared trials and mutual respect, let us toast this night's revelry and pledge to deepen our newly forged friendship through honest companionship and good cheer."

The words seemed to resonate in the warm air, carrying weight beyond their simple meaning. Everyone raised their glasses in response—even Shirou, though his participation came with a distinctly begrudging air that suggested he was already anticipating whatever embarrassing revelation might come next.

"Didn't you start tonight's service sitting down whilst indulging in what could only be described as shameless gluttony?" Shirou's voice cut through the night air with surgical precision, delivering one final, sarcastic rebuke.

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**END**

**Glossary:**

Chawan - Japanese Rice Bowl

Paitan - Means white soup, basically tonkotsu, but a more general term, as the ton in tonkotsu means pork.

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