

STUDIO
HEARTS
PRESENTS

1





DOOMSDAY REQUIEM WITH YOU

WRITTEN BY
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CHAPTER 1

The thicket rustled softly as I crouched lower, pressing the binoculars to my eyes, the silver rims gleaming faintly under moonlight. Damp earth and crushed leaves clung to my skirt, but I hardly cared. Beyond the brambles, torches lined the walkways of the Academy's inner court, their flames bowing and swaying with the night's breath. Shadows of students in hushed clusters flitted across the high walls, their laughter lilting like distant bells.

And here I was, hiding in the bushes like a thief with contraband lenses.

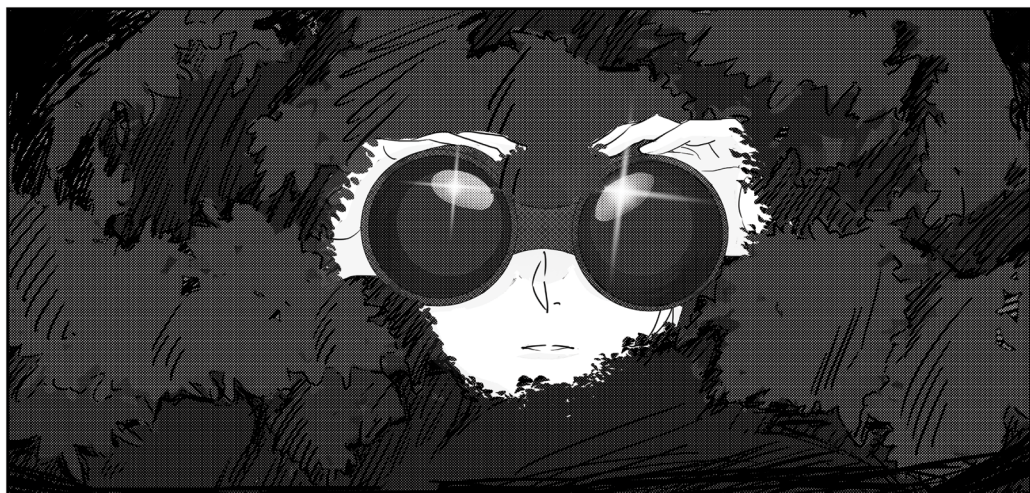
"What business did His Highness have with me, again?" I muttered, eyeing my rather unusual partner.

"Why, you surely jest, Lady Celestia. I must admit, I am wounded that you do not recall how deeply concerned I am for your well-being," he replied, placing one hand to his chest as if his incorporeal heart had been pierced. "Seeing as you delight in wandering where combustion is more than probable, I cannot quite fathom why you would court a meaningless demise over your otherwise bright future."

A pale shimmer took shape beside me, the faint outline of a man, hair the pale gold of dying embers, eyes aglow with a light unclaimed by any lantern. His lips curved in that too-perfect smile only royals were trained to wear.

I lowered the binoculars, squinting at him with the patience of a saint deprived of supper. "The truth?"

He leaned closer, voice lowered, mockery buried in velvet cadence.



"It amuses me to watch you go about making a fool of yourself."

"Tch."

I parted the bushes slightly as I turned my gaze outward. *I shouldn't have expected much from him.* The Academy stretched before us in breathtaking expanse. Marble towers rose like alabaster spears, veined with ivy and crowned with glittering glass domes that caught moonlight and fractured it into a thousand prisms. The high curtain walls encircling the grounds glowed faintly with wards, runes etching and shifting as though alive. Below, a steady stream of students in dark uniforms traversed the courtyards, their chatter weaving into the hum of a self-contained city.

How splendid. How suffocating.

I drifted to a pillar where a prefect's badge flickered in torchlight. He watched the wall, not me.

"Do not linger by the walls," he said before I spoke. "The roots sing tonight. Keep your ears shut, lest they creep inside."

"Charming," I murmured, "but unhelpful." I tipped my chin at his badge. "Prefects are meant to assist."

"Prefects are meant to keep the unblessed from fouling with forces they cannot possibly avert." His breath frosted, a neat thread of ice-blessing on display. "Find a chaperone and do it in daylight. Do not keep muttering to yourself. It gets lonely quite quickly."

I smiled, which was my favorite way to bare teeth. *By myself? Does he not see his highness?*

I look around. I must seem a lunatic. *Where did that maddening prince go when he is needed? How vexing!*

"Daylight does not speak." I retorted. "People do, when no one is watching." Night loosens collars and tongues. Confessions of darkest secrets slip to corners that keep no records. By morning, everything is scrubbed bright and priced like a relic. *As if I would forsake the very front where whispers conspire.*

I left him to his posture and drifted toward the Inner Hall. *Where*

did that frivolous prince go?

Since my arrival I had learned one sovereign rule: the blessed claim the day and perform their wonders, while the unblessed master the art of shadow. With no hand to guide them, they wrest truth from silence—watch, press, and corner the unwilling until the story rattles out of them.

Or was that merely me?

“Left,” His Highness murmured, appearing like an enigma as usual. “Your curiosity may be better served by that young lady over there.”

A ring of girls my age stood beneath a colonnade, house sashes glowing faintly with heat, frost, wind, magic groomed into etiquette. I skirted them with a look that said *another time* and hooked toward easier prey: an isolated boy tucked in the buttress shadow, pale as unwritten paper.

“You,” I said, gently cornering him between stone. “Do you know of the song the roots sing? And where?”

He lifted those ink-drop eyes without startlement. “You dropped your ribbon,” he said, solemn as a bell.

“I am not wearing a ribbon.”

“You dropped your ribbon,” he repeated, then brightened, as if he’d found the right answer to his own riddle. “Follow the ribbon and you won’t be lost. That is what Mother says.”

“I would not know,” I admit. *Mine taught me to keep a dagger in my garter and a smile on my face.*

“Smiles are ribbons for the mouth,” he decided, and I had to lean to catch the faintness of it before he tried to slip past. I blocked him with a courteous half-step, let silence do the work, then released him when it was clear he had revealed all he knew.

I drifted back toward the colonnade His Highness had indicated and cut into the ring of girls like a knife wrapped in silk.

“Ladies,” I said, sugar laid neatly over steel, “a small curiosity. Does

the Inner Hall keep a private room? One furnished with instruments?”

One of them sniffed, wind-cold pricking the air about her. “The Drawing Room is for upper-years.”

“How fortunate that I am collecting directions, not permission.”

Their smiles sharpened, yet one girl’s gaze flicked to mine and, against her better judgment, she sang it soft as a secret:

“Take the left colonnade, beneath the third arch, walk straight. Behind the velvet lies the Drawing Room, the only one that keeps its instruments awake. They say a stone that drinks abides there. If you hear it ring thrice, mind yourself. Many forget their names to the sound. The air is like the Enigma’s breath, so keep your hands out of it.”

“Bad air?” I echoed. “Miasma?”

“The air that chews,” she murmured, nose wrinkling. “Do not put your fingers in it.”

“That tends to be the rule for ovens,” I returned, dry as chalk.

From the shrubbery behind me comes an unmistakable sound. Someone trying very hard not to laugh. It descends as a refined cough, then dissolves into a barely stifled giggle. I turn, smiling very pleasantly in the direction of the moon-cut prince, every syllable of my smile a threat.

“Is it that amusing, Your Highness?”

“Very,” he says, utterly unruffled. “It is delightful how, yet another night has come to pass, and we are yet to see even a trace of the First Curse of Solivayne. Preventing the combustion from happening is, I fear, a long, long way away.”

“Oh? You find my failure charming?”

“I find your persistence charming,” he corrected, warmth folded into the syllables like a note in a sleeve. “Failure is merely an excellent tutor.”

“In whose curriculum?”

“Yours, I fear.”

I pressed on toward the drawing room, boots whispering over stone. On the chapel steps held a sleepless bard with a travel-viol and a case held together by hope. He kept his eyes on the strings, as if the instrument alone were worth acknowledging.

“Speaking with him now, are we?” came the smooth aside at my shoulder.

“We know not what lies within the drawing room,” I said. “If it truly points to the First Curse, I would sooner evacuate the entire student body to the annex than pretend ignorance.”

I stepped squarely into the bard’s light. “One question,” I said, “or I rouse the sacristan and inquire whether unregistered midnight recitals are permitted.”

“How fearsome,” His Highness murmured, almost fond.

“The drawing room?” The bard sighed to the viol, as if it, not I, had asked. “Many have sought it. More have stumbled. If you reach the innermost room, the old instrument still answers. Not the organ.

The other one. Play it true, and a stone will show itself. Mind your manners. Break through the stone, and a corridor appears where no map consents to draw it. A mere crack shall not work.”

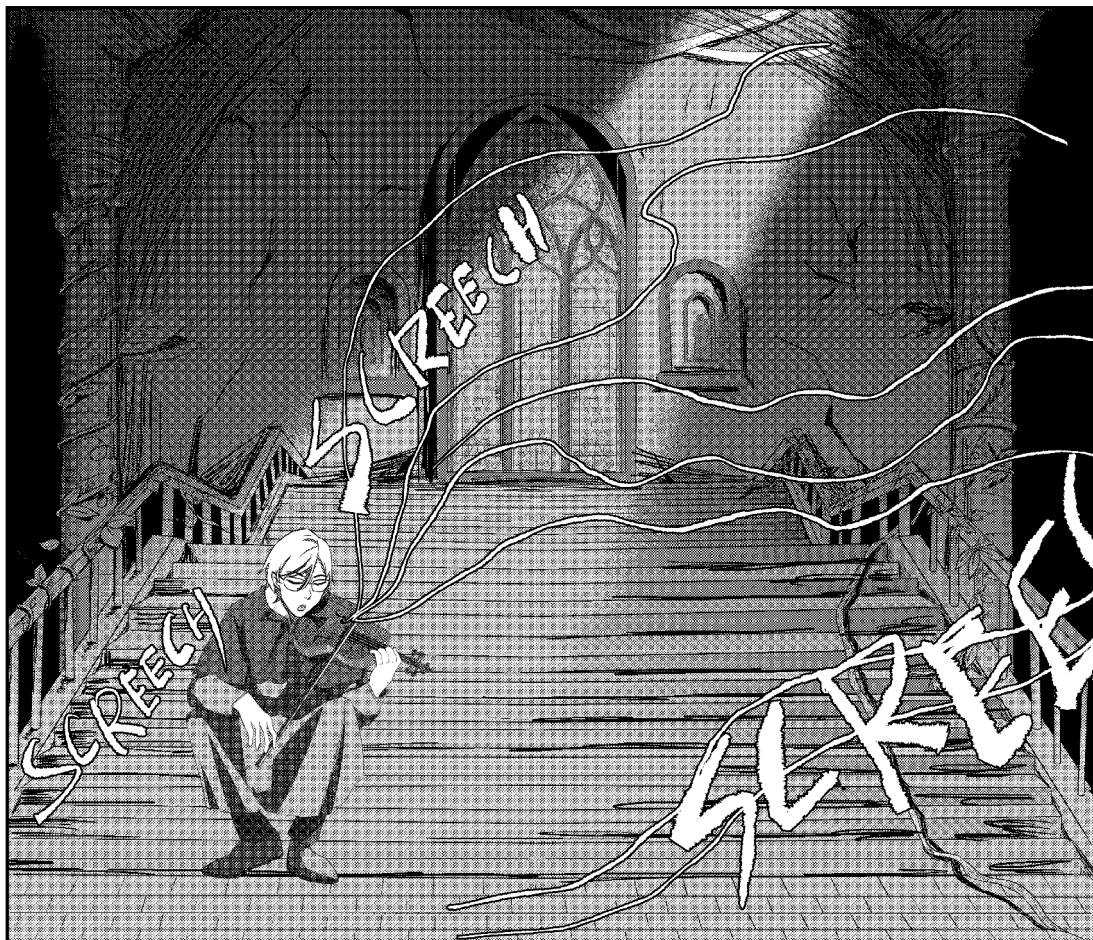
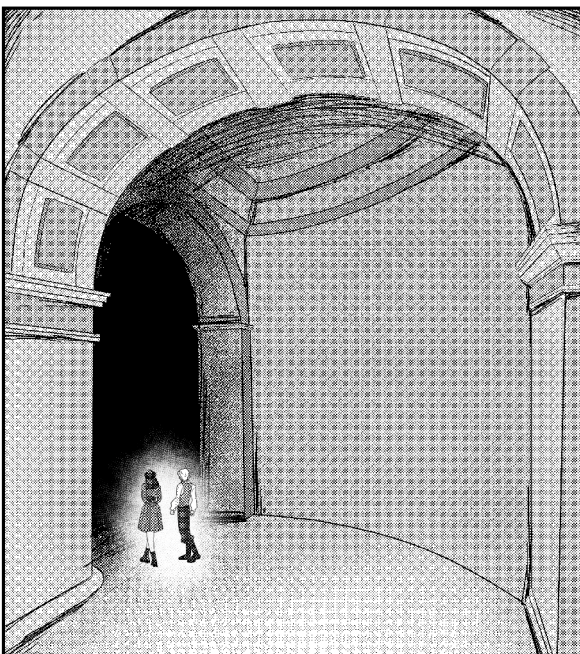
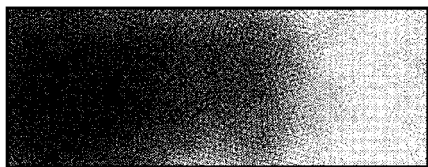
“Is that true?” I asked.

“A rumor,” he said, tightening a peg until the string sang thinly. “Were it solved, the curse would have ceased to exist, and we would’ve no longer been cursed to wither in its shadow.”

The words settled like chalk dust. Instrument. Drawing room. A stone that drinks names. It was a breakthrough.

Well then. *Tonight’s stroll had not been in vain after all.*

“Lady Celestia,” My companion quietly repeated. The formality in my name usually means he is about to say something that will annoy me. “If you must address the stone, whatever befalls, do not give it your name. Stones adore names. They keep them.”



"I shall offer it yours," I murmured.

He smiled, a fraction too pleased. "I have too many."

What a ridiculous man to be bound with in this cursed endeavor.

"Also, if you intend to prod a hungry stone at midnight, may I suggest you not do it alone?"

"Are you volunteering to accompany me, your highness?"

"Regretfully, my assistance is not what it could be, given the present... arrangement." A small pause. "But I could provide counsel. Or derision, should you prefer encouragement with an edge."

"I would rather not." I slipped the binoculars over my shoulder and turned toward the dormitory as the sky paled. "Had you a speck of decency, you would bring me a ribbon."

"Had you a speck of patience," he replies, "you would have waited for dawn."

I clicked my tongue. He's right.

My name is Celestia Varst. A first-year. Special Curriculum. Unblessed. My aim is simple: find the **Twelve Curses** and end combustion.

And this is His Highness Julius El Archistone, likewise of the Special Curriculum, blessings to spare and manners honed like steel.

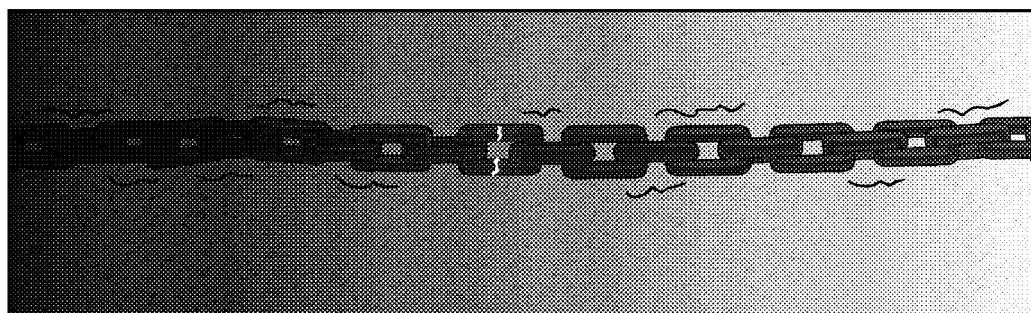
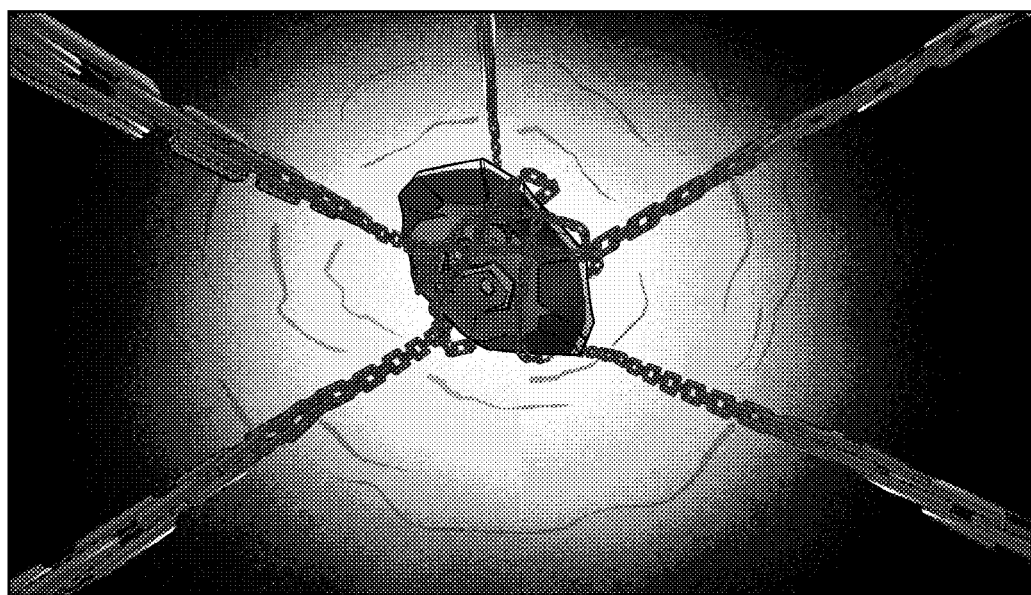
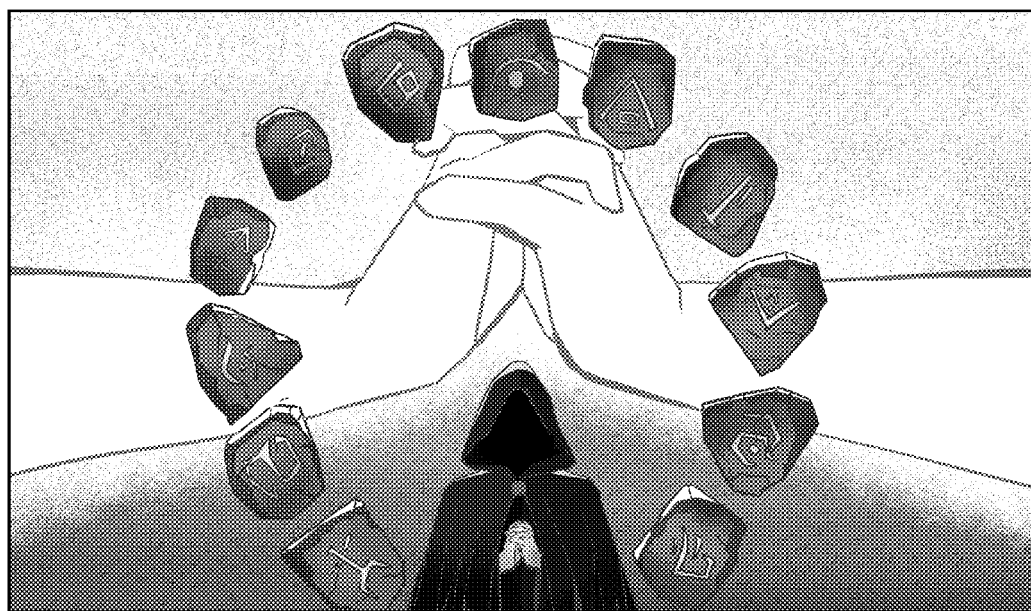
How did I become entangled with the Crown Prince of Solivayne, you ask?

That is a long story.



Every thousand years, the Enigma stirs.

It is neither creature nor curse in the ordinary sense, but a formless being that seeps quietly into the world. Invisible and patient, it drifts into the hearts of people and kindles the soul from within. At first, nothing seems amiss. Yet slowly, the soul burns brighter and brighter, until the human body can no longer contain it. In a single



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instant, the person collapses, their body turning to ash as though their very spirit had ignited.

To prevent this fate from consuming the world, the ancients of Solivayne bound the Enigma through twelve relics known as the Curses of Solivayne. Each curse acts as a seal, restraining the Enigma's power and delaying the catastrophe.

But the seals are not eternal.

Year after year, the Enigma grows stronger, pressing against its restraints and slowly claiming the relics for itself. As each of the twelve curses is eroded and overtaken, the balance that protects the world begins to falter. If the curses are not unraveled and the relics restored before the seals fail, the day will come when every soul in the world will ignite at once—leaving nothing behind but ash carried upon the wind.



The candlelight beside the bed flickered gently, throwing warm golden light across the carved wooden walls and the small mountain of pillows Celestia had buried herself beneath. Outside, the night winds brushed against the tall glass windows of the ducal manor, whispering quietly through the gardens.

Celestia, around six years old, laying on her bed, clutched the thick storybook in both hands as though it were treasure.

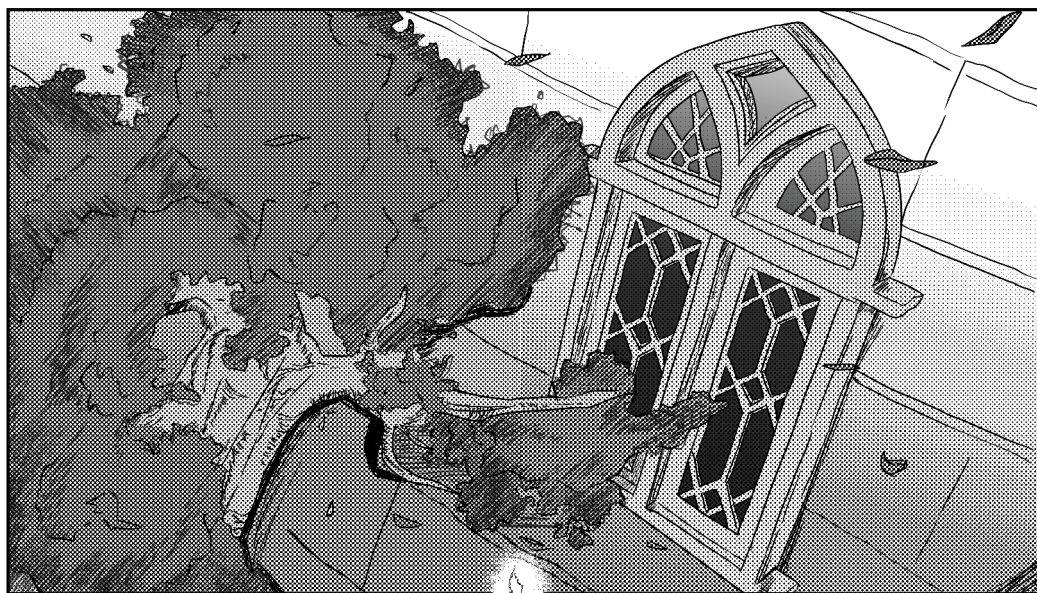
Across from her, perched awkwardly on the edge of the mattress, sat Duke Varst himself.

He was reading with far more seriousness than a bedtime story likely deserved.

"Every thousand years, the Enigma stirs..." he read in a deep, grave voice.

Celestia's eyes gleamed.

"Then comes a hero," The Duke read, his voice lowering into the



sort of dramatic tone he clearly enjoyed far too much for a bedtime story. “A hero who rises to confront the Enigma, halts the souls from igniting, and restores peace to the world.”

“Are you reading it again?”

The Duke froze.

Very slowly, he lifted his head.

Standing in the doorway was the Duchess of Varst, arms folded neatly, her posture immaculate despite the faintly amused disapproval in her eyes.

Duke Varst gulped.

“Umm...” His gaze drifted away in a very poor attempt at innocence.

Before the Duchess could say anything further, a small blur launched itself off the bed.

“Mama!” Celestia ran across the room and crashed into her mother with wide arms and shining eyes.

“Celestia!” the Duchess laughed softly, bending just in time to catch her. She lifted her daughter easily and spun her once in a gentle twirl, Celestia’s laughter filling the room.

The Duchess glanced toward the bed where the offending book still lay open.

“Your papa always likes to dampen the mood with stories about dreadful things that may never happen,” she said lightly, brushing Celestia’s hair behind her ear.

“People combusting into ash... mysterious ancient evils... honestly.”

Celestia tilted her head thoughtfully.

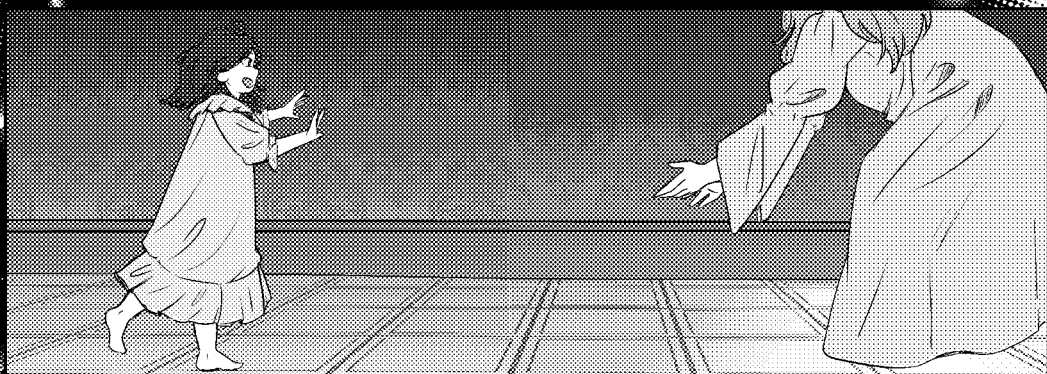
“It is a little scary.” She continued.

The Duke straightened his posture at once.

“It is not scary,” he protested. “It is educational.”

The Duchess gave him a look. “It is bedtime.”

The Duke walked over, clearing his throat with what he hoped was



dignity.

"But our Celestia does not need to worry about such things," he said reassuringly.

He gently tapped the tip of her nose. "She is the daughter of the Varst Duchy. One of the strongest houses in the kingdom."

Celestia puffed her chest proudly.

"And when her blessing awakens," the Duke continued, "she will be perfectly safe."

The Duchess raised one delicate brow.

"Safe?" she echoed.

"Yes."

"Safe... how?"

The Duke blinked. "With her blessing."

"And what exactly do you plan for her to do with that blessing?" the Duchess asked calmly.

The Duke frowned slightly. "Well... train, of course."

The Duchess sighed. "Train for what?"

"The Enigma, naturally."

She stared at him. "So your plan," she said slowly, "is to raise our daughter into one of those reckless academy fighters?"

"They are not reckless," the Duke objected. "They defend the kingdom!"

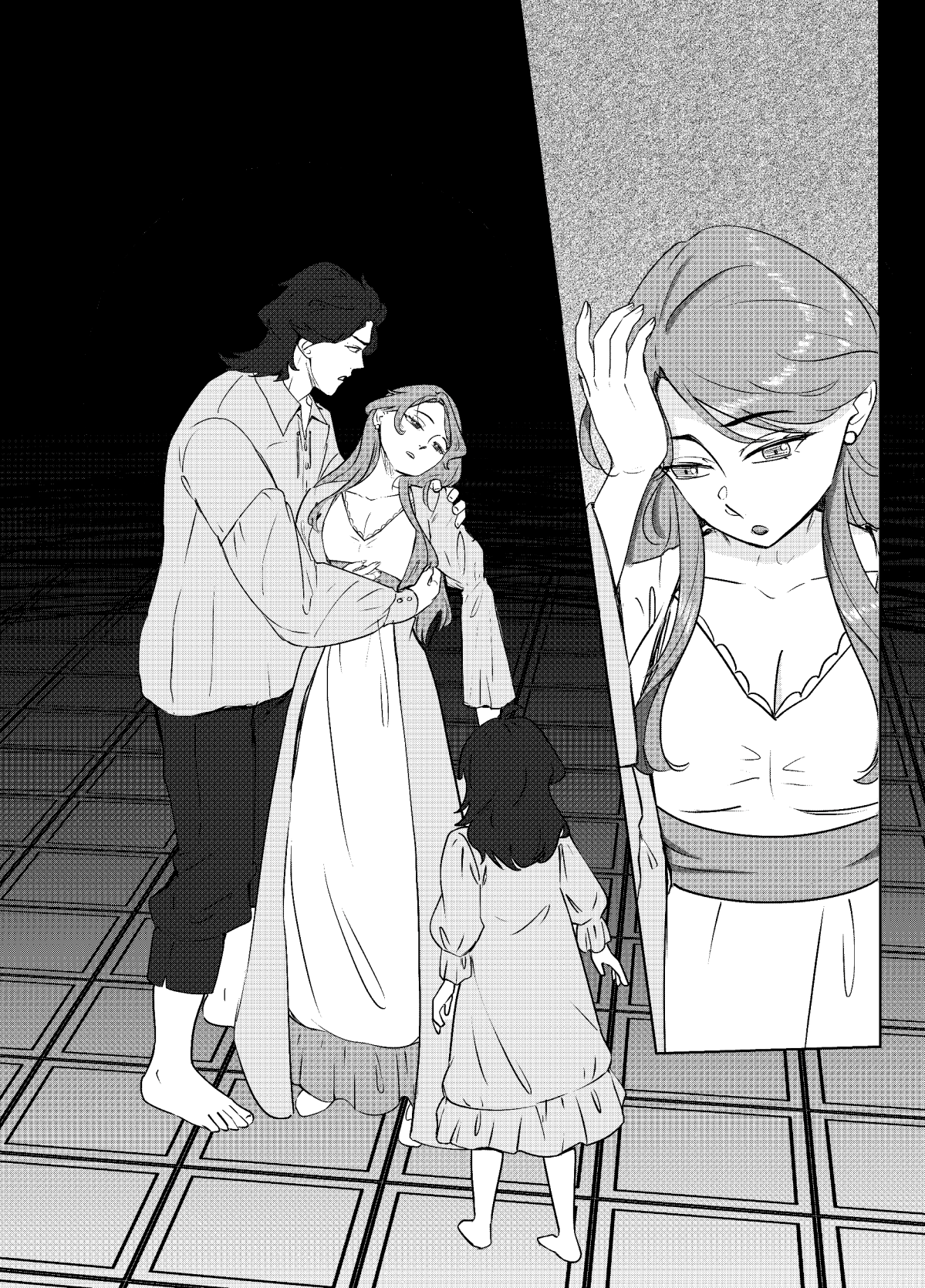
"They nearly get themselves killed before they reach twenty."

"They are heroes!"

"They are children!" she screamed, "I will not have our Celestia anywhere near that blasphemous academy. All she needs is a quiet life and the safety of this house."

The Duke sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose as though the matter had been debated far too many times already. "The time will come when she must enter the academy," he said calmly. "That is the way of every noble born with a blessing."

The Duchess narrowed her eyes. "And you are already planning to



send her there?”

“I am planning,” Papa replied patiently, “for the future she will one day walk into.”

Mama huffed. “Well, when that day arrives, her safety will come first.”

Papa nodded immediately as she they shared glances of agreement.

“That,” he said, “we are entirely of one mind about.”

Celestia puffed her cheeks.

“Mama.”

“Papa.”

They turned to face her, with their arms still linked, as they looked down.

Celestia planted her tiny fists on her hips with dramatic seriousness.

“I want to fight against the Enigma!”

Silence filled the room.

The Duke slowly turned his head toward the Duchess.

The Duchess slowly turned toward the Duke.

Both of their faces turned pale.

The Duke looked like he had just swallowed a lemon. The Duchess fainted, as the Duke held onto her tightly, “Honey?!”.


I first heard of the academy long before I ever saw its gates. It was spoken of at dinner tables and at tea parties, in the quiet pride of noble houses whose children had been enrolled to hone their blessings, and in the hushed reverence reserved for those who fought the Enigma.

The academy was where children with Blessings learned to wield them. Not every child had one, of course. Among commoners it was rare enough to be whispered about like a miracle. But among nobles

it was simply *expected*. Fire, water, wind, earth, ice, light, darkness... every great house carried some fragment of elemental power in its bloodline.

All nobles attended the academy, whether they had awakened their Blessing or not. It was simply part of growing up in a noble household. Commoners, however, were admitted only if they possessed a Blessing. Because of that, most of the students came from noble families.

And among them, a few would prove extraordinary. Those few would not remain at the academy for long. They were sent somewhere else entirely.

In the first year, everyone studied together. The regular course. Discipline, theory, control. By the end of that year, the instructors chose the best among them and separated them from the rest. Those students were taken to the Front Base, where the Enigma crept closest to the borders of the world.

The academy trained students. The Front Base trained soldiers.

I remember the day I announced that I intended to fight the Enigma. Mother looked so frightened that I almost regretted saying it aloud. But I meant it.

I wanted to join the special course, and for that I studied harder than anyone else.

Being born into the ducal family meant expectations came before memory. I do not remember my birth, of course, but the story has been told to me often enough that I can picture it clearly. The halls filled with servants and officials, the bells ringing across the estate. The duchy had produced sons for generations. And then I arrived.

The first daughter our family had ever known.

From that moment onward, people spoke of me as though I had been sent by the heavens themselves. "Our princess," they would say. "The duchy has been blessed."

A blessing. Everyone assumed I would have one.

My childhood became a quiet race toward that moment. Tutors rotated through my days like the hands of a clock—history, mathematics, philosophy, strategy. I read until candlelight blurred the ink across the page.

All of it with the same unspoken promise. One day I would stand among those who fought the Enigma and help prevent the catastrophe that threatened our world.

Somewhere along the way, I also acquired a fiancé. He was... rather insufferable, if I'm being honest. Bratty, loud, and entirely too pleased with himself. But our engagement had been decided long before either of us understood what such promises meant. Apparently our fathers had settled the matter over

drinks one evening. His family belonged to a grand duchy, and once my father had given his word, it could not be taken back.

Mother, however, was far less pleased.

I remember the first time he tugged at my hair. Mother saw it happen. Her smile was radiant. Perfectly polite.

"Would the young lord care for some tea?" she asked. The maids escorted him away. Once he was gone, Mother crouched beside me and brushed the loose strands of hair from my face.

"If he ever mistreats you again, Tia," she murmured softly, "knock him unconscious."

She gave a small nod toward the door where the maids had taken him. "I will handle the rest."

Not long after that, my lessons changed.

Books remained, of course, but mornings began to smell of steel and sweat. Wooden swords replaced quills. Archery targets lined the gardens. The training grounds become my second home.

Father watched one afternoon, leaning lazily against a pillar as I tried to lift a practice blade that was still a little too heavy for me.

"Does little Tia really need all this?" he asked, amused. "Once her magic awakens, the power she inherits alone will be enough."

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Mother did not even turn her head. “A strong body strengthens the soul,” she said.

Father surrendered instantly. With a sheepish smile, he would conjure delicate flowers and little hearts from shimmering ice, kneeling before her in apology.

Even now, that memory makes me laugh.

For a while, life was that simple and *perfect*.

Then came the coming-of-age ceremony.

The entire kingdom gathered for it. Debutantes stood in a long line beneath the vaulted ceiling of the temple hall while nobles watched from above. One by one the Blessings revealed themselves.

Flames flickered in open palms. Wind spiraled through the air like invisible ribbons. Water rose and folded back into itself.

When my turn came, the hall grew very quiet. I reached inward, searching for the power everyone had always said was mine. Nothing answered.

I tried again. Still nothing.

The priests spoke the verdict without hesitation. “Unblessed.”

The word settled over the hall like dust. For a moment I did not understand what it meant. Then I looked up. Mother’s face had gone pale. The composure she wore so effortlessly had cracked, just enough for me to see the pain beneath it. Father stood rigid before the altar, his eyes fixed somewhere beyond it, as though the priests had spoken nonsense and the truth would reveal itself if he simply waited long enough.

That was when the meaning finally reached me.

A hollow opened quietly in my chest. Guilt coiled around my heart, yet all I could manage was a weak smile. “I’m sorry.”

Later that night Mother held me so tightly I could hardly breathe. Her arms wrapped around me as if she could shield me from the world simply by refusing to let go. Tears slid down my face in slow, silent lines as I buried my face against her shoulder, crying until



exhaustion finally dragged me to sleep.

All those years of studying. All those mornings of training. Had they all been for nothing?

And the whispers began. Servants carried them through the halls. Nobles carried them through the court. Some advised Father to try again for another heir. My engagement quietly dissolved. Friends who once filled our gardens stopped visiting.

Then the letter from the academy arrived. Father tried to stop me. "You do not have to go," he said gently. "They will talk."

But I had already packed my things. The carriage waited at the gates. The academy stood somewhere beyond the hills.

Blessing or not... I was going.

So I straightened my shoulders, stepped forward—and left. The absence of something that was never mine was not enough to stop me.



Or so I thought.

Standing before the academy now, I tilted my head back and took in the building rising above me like a fortress carved into the clouds. The stone walls stretched impossibly high, towers cutting into the pale sky. My travel bag felt heavier than it should have in my hand.

Behind me, the ducal carriage waited.

Ahead of me, the academy doors stood open.

For the first time since leaving home, it occurred to me that I was truly alone. I swallowed the knot in my throat and stepped inside.

"Hey. Long time no see." A hand tapped my shoulder.

I turned and blinked in surprise. "Cassy?"

Cassandra, the Count's daughter, smiled brightly at me. We had known each other as children, though the years had carried us to different tutors and estates.

"You actually came," she said, looking me up and down with mild astonishment.

Before I could answer, a few other girls gathered around us, curious. They introduced themselves one by one. Name. House. Blessing.

"Wind." "Fire." "Water."

Their voices carried an easy pride, the way nobles always spoke when announcing their element. Someone turned to me. "And yours?"

Before I could open my mouth, Cassy cut in. "She's unblessed," she said quickly. "It's rude to ask further."

She said it as though she were protecting me. But the words landed heavier than if I had spoken them myself. The girls fell silent for a moment before nodding politely and moving on.

I forced a small smile and followed them toward the assembly hall.

The entrance ceremony began soon after, though I barely registered most of it. Words drifted past me. Welcoming speeches, academy rules, applause. My thoughts wandered until the headmaster's voice suddenly sharpened. "And now, a speech from the student who entered this year with the most exemplary marks."

The hall doors opened. For a moment the light from outside spilled in behind him, and the entire room seemed to still. The handsomest person I had ever laid eyes on walked through the doorway.

His Highness, the Crown Prince.

He carried himself with effortless confidence, dark hair catching the light as he stepped forward. The hall watched him the way people watched a rising star in the night sky. When he spoke, his voice filled the room easily.

"I imagine many of you arrived today with certain expectations," he began, his gaze sweeping across the gathered students. "New friendships. New rivalries. Perhaps a little freedom from the



supervision of home.”

A few quiet laughs rippled through the hall.

“But let me ask you something.” He paused. “What do you think this academy is for?”

No one answered.

“Is it for socializing? For making acquaintances with noble houses?” he continued calmly. “For enjoying the last peaceful years of your youth?”

His eyes sharpened. “If the world itself ceases to exist, what use will any of that be?”

“The Enigma is not some distant tale meant to frighten children,” he said. “It grows. It spreads. Every year it moves closer.” His voice lowered. “One day it will reach someone you love.”

The hall had gone completely silent. “When that day comes, and they begin to combust, you will wish you had trained harder. You will wish you had begun sooner. You will wish you had not wasted a single moment pretending the danger did not exist.”

He straightened slightly. “No one will save you then.”

His gaze swept across us again, steady and unflinching. “You will have to save yourselves.”

“So ask yourselves this now,” he said. “Will you idle your life away while the world rots around you?” His voice rose, firm and clear.

“Or will you stand up for something?”

“Hone your Blessings,” he continued. “Take up your weapons. Prepare yourselves to face the Enigma.”

A murmur rippled through the hall. “If any among you wish to fight for this world, for your loved ones, for yourself, for the people who cannot stand here today... I hope to meet you there. In the special course.”

He smiled as he said it, walking away after he was done without looking back.

For a heartbeat, the entire hall held its breath. Then whispers

broke out everywhere at once.

And as if the speech itself had not been enough, the rumors began to spread quickly among the students.”

“It is easy for his highness to say...,” they muttered, “After all, he possesses two Blessings.”

“Light. And darkness. Both were rare. Yet he holds them both.”

“Some people truly could have everything.”

I barely heard the whispers. My chest felt warm, something bright stirring where emptiness had settled for weeks. His highness’ words had struck something inside me. My eyes were shining before I even realized it.

So what if I was unblessed? The top students of the regular course enter the special program. If I mastered every subject—strategy, combat theory, history, tactics—and failed in only one... Would not having a blessing truly be enough to stop me?

Hope flickered quietly in my chest. I had a goal again. To join the special course.

Cassy reached out to me, “Celestia?” she asked.

“The Crown Prince was overwhelming wasn’t he...?”

“A bit too ambitious, if you ask me.” Someone else added.

I listened for a moment before glancing toward the stage again.

Wasn’t he... kind of cool though?

Soon the ceremony ended, and we began making our way toward the academic tower.

At the base of the building, I stopped.

At the base of the main academic tower, I stopped. The staircase rose upward in an endless spiral of stone. My stomach sank. It felt less like climbing stairs and more like ascending into the clouds.

“Who could possibly walk all that?” I muttered under my breath.

Around me, students simply laughed. Wind lifted a few into the air. Water carried others upward like flowing currents. Fire burst beneath someone’s feet in controlled bursts. They glided past the



staircase effortlessly. My new friends looked back at me.

“What’s wrong?” Cassy asked.

“I... forgot something,” I said quickly. They shrugged and continued upward, their Blessings carrying them toward the upper levels. Soon the courtyard grew quiet. I turned back to the staircase. Since I had no Blessing, the only way up...

was to walk.

I placed a hand on the railing and began climbing. The stairs seemed endless. Was everything going to be like this?

Every step slower than everyone else. Every path harder. Just as I took another step—

an arm suddenly wrapped around my waist.

“What—?!”

The ground disappeared beneath my feet.

“Hey! What are you doing? Let me go!”

The hand holding me barely slowed as wind curled around us, lifting us past the endless staircase as if it were nothing.

“You’re one of those unblessed, aren’t you?” he said. “I’ve heard they exist... but this is the first time I’ve actually seen one.”

Before I could even process his words, we reached the top landing. He set me down like I weighed nothing.

“Thanks—” I started. But he was already walking away. He raised one hand casually over his shoulder in farewell without turning back.

I watched him go, heat rising to my cheeks. What... was that?

And then the realization struck me. “Wait.” I stared after him.

“Wasn’t that... the Crown Prince?”



