

[Jellal Fernades. POV]

The weight of the situation bore down on me. He had destroyed everything, once again.

He had intervened in what should've happened.

It was him once again.

It was always him!

As those thoughts echoed in my head, my frustration and anger threatening to boil over. I gritted my teeth, the metallic taste of blood filling my mouth as I bit down hard.

Every nerve in my body screamed in protest, a silent testament to the storm of emotions within me.

Adam stood there, smiling at my suffering, at my failure. My rage soared at the sight of him, my helplessness turning into a burning fury.

He had taken everything from me, my plans, my dreams, everything!

"You couldn't stay away, could you?" I slammed my fists onto the ground, the force of the impact sending a spider-web of cracks racing across the floor. "You ruined everything!"

The echo of the blow rang out in the devastated room, increasing the length of the cracks with each blow.

"Stay away? Are you delirious now? You tried to kidnap me," Adam replied.

I knew Adam was stronger.

I knew the odds were against me.

I had no reason to continue fighting.

No reason to exist.

But the despair and the rage that filled me overrode all reason, all fear. He had taken more than he could ever know from me.

I was a cornered beast, my back against the wall. And like any cornered beast, I would fight.

With a roar that seemed to shake the very foundations of the shattered Tower, I charged. My legs propelled me forward, my every instinct screaming at me to attack. "Meteor!"

The distance between us shrank rapidly, my body glowing, and as I hurtled towards him, the world seemed to blur around me.

It was just me and him.

Everything else faded into the background.

"You don't learn, do you?" Adam taunted as he sidestepped my attack. "You can't beat me, no matter how hard you try."

I lunged at him again, my fists and feet flying in every direction. Adam dodged each attack with ease, his movements fluid like water.

"Grand Chariot!" I shouted, summoning seven seals high above the sky. Each Magic seal then released a powerful light blast down on him, forming a celestial pattern on the ground before exploding.

"You can try, you can plot, you can rage, but it won't change the inevitable, you will never beat me," Adam said, his voice chillingly calm as he emerged unscathed from the blast.

"Shut up!" I screamed, desperation and fury fueling my every move as I charged him once more. "Pleiades!"

However, as I closed in, Adam's form seemed to blur, almost as if reality itself was wavering around him. Then, in a blink, he was gone.

Every sense of high alert I skidded to a halt, my gaze darting around frantically for any sign of him.

Then, it hit me.

A force akin to a speeding freight train slammed into my abdomen. His fist, a battering ram, drove the wind out of my lungs. My breath hitched, a searing pain shooting through me, eclipsing every other sensation.

I doubled over, collapsing onto my knees, gasping for air that wouldn't come. My vision began to swim, the edges darkening ominously.

My body felt weightless, as if I was drifting in an endless void, and just like that, the world around me started to blur, my consciousness slipping away.

Through the haze of pain and disorientation, I saw Adam. His eyes were not filled with triumph or malice. They bore a look I hadn't expected, they were filled with pity.

He gazed down at me, his eyes reflecting a deep sorrow and sense of regret that took me by surprise.

There was no hate in his gaze.

No anger.

Just... pity and sorrow.

He couldn't even give me that?

How pathetic is that?

The one I hate the most, doesn't see me worthy of his hate, but of his pity.

The sight burned into my memory, an indelible mark of my downfall. And with that, I succumbed to the darkness, the taste of defeat bitter on my tongue.

[Adam C. POV.]

As the dust from the ruined Tower of Heaven cleared, and Jellal dropped to the floor, my eyes sought out one person amidst the aftermath of the battle.

Erza.

Spotting her among the rubble, a smile tugged at my lips.

"Is finally over," I sighed, watching as Erza broke into a run towards me. Her usually steely eyes were filled with an intensity that was uncharacteristically raw.

For a moment, I felt a glimmer of surprise. Was that relief I saw in her gaze? Was it happiness?

Perhaps it was both?

Smiling, my body braced for the impact of the hug I was sure she was about to give me. The tension in my muscles eased slightly, a small smile tugging at the corner of my lips in anticipation of the embrace.

My senses heightened and just as I was about to close my eyes in preparation for the inevitable hug, I saw her hand ball up into a fist.

"Wait, that's not a hu-" I started, but the sentence was left unfinished as her fist drove into my gut with the force of a rampaging bull.

"Oof!" I gasped, doubling over. I clutched my aching stomach, grimacing as I looked up at her.

"You idiot!" she snapped, her voice shaking with restrained emotion. "You made me think...you made us think...you were dead!"

I honestly thought they would see through my plan.

She stood there, chest heaving, her fiery eyes glaring at me. "You complete and utter moron!" she huffed out. "Do you know how worried we were?!"

I have an idea now.

I straightened up slowly, biting back a groan. "I have an educated guess," I managed to wheeze out between breaths. I could tell she wasn't finished yet, her eyebrows still furrowed in that tell-tale trademark Erza scowl.

"Next time you decide to play dead," she continued, wagging her finger at me, "Do me a favor and actually let me in on your plan!"

I chuckled, wincing as the motion sent another throb of pain through my body. "Duly noted, Erza," I said, offering her a mock salute.

Erza huffed, but the corners of her lips lifted ever so slightly. "Good," she said, crossing her arms over her chest. "Because I

don't think I... I mean, we could handle another scare like that."

I grinned at her, feeling warmth spread through me at the fact that she cared enough to worry. "Won't happen again."

No sooner had I finished that, when I spotted another familiar face rushing towards me in the horizon. My little sister.

"Cana, how... wait, not again!" I tried to protest, but my warning fell on deaf ears.

I was going to get punched again, wasn't I?

Before I had a chance to ponder on that thought, she came barreling towards me at full speed, an unmistakable gleam in her eye.

Showing no mercy, she launched herself at me, and drop-kicked me, her foot colliding with my chest with a force I wouldn't have thought she was capable of.

"Don't you dare scare me like that again!" Cana yelled furiously, her fists pounding my chest as tears streamed down her face. "Do you hear me? Don't you ever do that to me again!"

Patting her head, I straightened up, rubbing my chest where her boot had landed. "Dear sister, was that really necessary?"

"Of course, it was," Cana retorted, crossing her arms. "You deserved that; you jerk!"

I guess I thought wrong when I thought they would know me enough to know I wasn't going down that easily. Note taken, won't happen again.

Then, as Cana grumbled something about me being 'a big, stupid, something', my gaze drifted to the back of the room, where another figure was stepping forward.

A tall, muscular man, known as Simon.

"Oh yeah, that's Si-" Cana began, however, before she could finish her sentence a sharp intake of breath cut through the air.

Erza. She was standing frozen in place, her eyes wide as they locked onto Simon.

"Simon..." Erza whispered, her voice barely audible, but the shock in her tone clear.

Silently, I watched them both, a myriad of emotions playing on their faces - shock, relief, apprehension, but most importantly, regret.

I guess now it was time to deal with the aftermath of everything.