

Daniel and Trent, after their meeting, go down to the basement to check out the game room Trent mentioned to him earlier. The place was much more spacious than Daniel originally thought. Along with a bar and stools, there is a darts wall with a list of high scores hanging next to it. It has a pinball machine, foosball table, and a jukebox. Weirdly enough, one of the walls has several scorch marks on it in a haphazard pattern. Daniel and Trent take a seat at the bar.

“Whaddya think? Pretty sweet right?” Trent asks, smiling.

“It’s hot down here.” Daniel complains.

“Oh, my fault, that’s me. The Magician’s Ruby’s aura makes the air around me hotter,” Trent apologizes. “I’d turn it off, but I physically can’t, so…”

“So what power do you have?”

“I can control fire! Check it.”

Trent balls up both of his hands into fists. He points with one finger, and a small flame comes out. The fire swirls around his finger for a bit before he closes his fist, extinguishing it.

“Cool!”

“My favorite move is the fireball.” He brags. He opens up his palm and a ball of fire forms in his hand. Daniel gets closer to the fire and looks at it closely. After a few seconds, he reaches out to touch it.

Trent quickly pulls his hand back. "That's still real fire, idiot!"

“Sorry.”

Trent shakes his head in disapproval before flinging the fireball at the wall covered in scorch marks. The fire hits and explodes, leaving another mark on the wall. Sparks dance from the area of impact. Daniel claps joyfully.

“Thank you, thank you.” Trent bows as if he’s performing in front of an audience.

“TRENT!” Marika’s voice shrieks, making every article and item in the basement rattle.

“You better not be practicing your fire on the wall again! If I find another scorch mark on the wall, you’re on cleaning duty for the next two months!”

Trent ducks anxiously, not wanting to experience Marika’s wrath again. It's silent for a while until Trent speaks up.

“You’re in for something special, you know that?”

“What do you mean?”

“We never got to tell you what The Gem of The World does,” He says with excitement, leaning slightly closer to Daniel. “It’ll grant wishes to whoever has it.”

“Any wish?”

“Anything conceivable.”

“I probably should choose carefully. How many do I get? One? Three?”

“Oh, it’s infinite. As long as you have it, of course. I’m just curious, what would you use it for?”

Daniel looks over at the wall of beverages on the wall behind the bar, both alcoholic and nonalcoholic. “Anything I want, huh?”

Trent nods once.

“In that case, I’d wish for Eliza to fall in love with me.”

Trent’s face contorts into a sea of wrinkles. “Eliza?! Eww!”

“What’s wrong with that?!”

Trent throws his hands up in surrender. “As long as you happy, bro.”

“Why’d you join, then? What’s your wish?”

“To be real with you, I don’t really care about The World or whatever. I joined for the free housing, game room and hot meals. How could I say no?”

Daniel laughs. Trent laughs as well. Daniel and Trent talk for a bit more about themselves and their lives. The conversation goes on for quite a while, but they quickly run out of topics to talk about.

“Darts?” Daniel offers.

“Darts.” Trent nods.

\*\*\*

Later that day, Daniel is sitting in the living area of the Tavern. He has his laptop out, but forgot the charger for it back home. He can’t just run back out and get it considering he doesn’t have a bicycle, public transit and traffic is still a mess, and he does NOT want to walk another thirty minutes in his uniform dress shoes again.

Val walks by Daniel as he’s banging on his keyboard, vainly hoping it will still have some battery life. Val notices what Daniel is doing and stops in his tracks.

“Everything okay?” He asks.

“Forgot my laptop charger.” Daniel sighs.

“Want me to help?” Val asks. Daniel hesitantly agrees. Val aims his left index finger at Daniel’s laptop. A small bolt of lightning comes out from his fingertip and hits the device. After a few seconds, Daniel cautiously presses a random key on his keyboard. The laptop responds. Daniel excitedly tries several other keys, then checks the power icon. Fully charged.

“Thanks.” Daniel nods gratefully.

“I’m Val. I’m two grades above you. My Power Stone is The Emperor’s Topaz. Electricity powers.”

“Look, I’m just grateful you fixed my laptop. Hi-five!” Daniel throws his hand for a high five. A stinging sensation courses through his hand as a sharp prickling sound can be heard. He jerks his arm back, shaking it in pain.

“Sorry. My aura makes the air around me electrically charged, so it’s easy for me to shock you.”

\*\*\*

The first thing that greets Daniel the next morning is the smell of eggs, bacon, toast and coffee as he waltzes right through the kitchen. Eliza is waiting at one of the dining room chairs and Christian is prancing around the kitchen. He walks from cabinet to cabinet, taking various spices and ingredients.

“Ah, Daniel,” Christian greets as he wipes the sweat off his forehead with the length of his bare arm. “Good morning.”

“Good morning, future brother-in-law.” Daniel mutters under his breath.

“What?” Christian utters, mildly perturbed.

“I didn’t say anything.” Daniel lies.

“Could you do me a favor?” Christian points to a carton of milk next to Daniel. “Pass me the milk?”

Daniel picks up the milk carton and tosses it at Christian overhand. The milk falls short of Christian as it nearly hits the countertop. Christian reaches a hand out and the milk suspends in mid-air. He uses the air current to pull the milk back to him.

“Thanks.” Christian smiles. He pours the milk into a large bowl full of pancake batter and stirs it in. Daniel takes a seat next to Eliza at the table.

“In case you were wondering, Christian’s stone is The Hierophant’s Peridot. Controls air and wind.”

“Why is his hair blowing? There’s like, no air or wind blowing in here.”

“Aura.” She concisely answers.

“Ah. Everyone here has pretty cool powers.” Daniel comments, nodding.

“You’re really stupid, you know that?”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re doing this just to make me happy?”

“Of course, milady.” Daniel teases.

“I clocked you in the head with a hammer I made out of ICE!”

“Oh,” Daniel lowers his head. He then looks back up at her. “I’m sure you had a good reason to.”

Eliza’s eye twitches at Daniel’s naivete.

“Ancient technique.” Christian speaks up, still focusing on his cooking. “Thousands of years ago, people who didn’t know which stones had which aura, they would feint an attack to trick the user into revealing their stone.”

“It should’ve worked on him, though.”

“How quickly did you attack him?” Christian asks, looking over to Eliza.

“He just turned around when I bonked him on the head.”

“Did he react at all?”

“No.”

Christian laughs. “You hit him on the head too early, didn’t you?”

Eliza’s face tints a pinkish red as she realizes her mistake.

“On top of that, you attacked him BEFORE his awakening? How do you expect him to defend himself with a power he didn’t even know he had?”

She growls at her sneering brother.

“Anyway, I’ll go ahead and try my absolute best to get that Gem for you!” Daniel confidently pounds his fists.

“Weirdo.” Eliza snorts, but can’t fight the tiny smile infesting her face. Christian places two plates of eggs and bacon in front of them.

“Both of you weirdos enjoy it. I made Daniel’s with love, and this ungrateful snot’s with all the hatred that could possibly burn in a person’s soul.”

“Fuck you, Chris.” Eliza grumbles, stabbing her fork into a piece of bacon.

“Feeling’s mutual, you little punk.” Christian bites back. Daniel laughs a little, thinking they’re just bantering. But as he eats his salty eggs, he gets the feeling that the exchange just now had some underlying resentment. Like magma waiting for an opening in the Earth’s crust, all the gas and pressure biding their time, ready to explode.