

— *October 5th, 1906. Outside the Schumacher House, 7:30 A.M.* —

Aigis, now 7 years old, stood by the Weser River that flowed in their backyard. Her eyes wanted to close, and she struggled to open them wide. The morning sun's rays reflected off the water's surface, and the white, foggy haze was so bright she could barely see the water. Aigis wobbled, trying to stand up straight by the river. Vergil had barged into her room and snatched her out of the bed at 4 that morning to take her training. The only thing he fed her for breakfast was an unidentifiable gray slop that she knew nothing about aside from Vergil dodging her question and saying "It's good for you". She wasn't one to question her father, despite there being many times over the past year of her training where she wanted to speak up. Aigis wanted to see the Promised Land Johanna described to her. And to get there, she'd need to devote herself to her training. No matter how many bruises, cuts, sleepless nights or sudden awakenings she had to endure. Her birthday was two days ago, so she'd at least hope Vergil would lighten up on her training. Not at all.

Aigis' thoughts are interrupted by a sudden splash of cold autumn water in her face. Vergil splashed some of the river water in her face, snapping her awake.

"Hey, wake up. We're starting." He impatiently scolded her, tapping his foot on the dew-coated grass. Aigis, dazed and dripping wet, looks up to her father with sleepy eyes.

"Come on," Vergil yelled, snapping directly in his daughter's face. "I don't have all day."

"I'm sorry, papa." She whined, rubbing the sleep out of her eye with her fat knuckles. Vergil groaned, readjusting his brown trench coat. He took a couple of steps back.

"Although your offensive powers could use some work, I suppose they're *decent*. But we're going to try something different today."

"Different?"

“I want to at least get you started on mastering defensive skills. For this exercise, I will attack you and you have to bring up an Aurae shield to defend yourself.”

“Okay...” Aegis yawned hesitantly. Vergil took a few more paces back until he and Aegis were about 3 yards (About 3 meters) apart from each other. He raised a hand and a blue electricity orb spawned itself in his palm. It crackled weakly, only occasionally. A weak orb like that shouldn’t have been that painful. Vergil took aim and hurled the orb at Aegis, and it hurled toward the drowsy 7-year-old. Aegis, without thinking, pulled both arms toward her chest in a cross formation. The orb slammed into her arms and propelled her body back. Thankfully, planting her feet on the ground kept her from toppling over. The remaining bits of electricity coursed through her arms.

“What the hell was that?” Vergil criticized, irritated.

“You told me to defend myself!” Aegis defensively argued.

“With your POWERS, not your arms! What’s the point of being a Psychokinetic if we never used our powers? That’d make you no better than those mouth-breathing no bloods.”

“I’m sorry, papa.” She pleaded again, rubbing her arm where the orb hit.

“I don’t want to hear that you’re sorry. I want to SEE it. Again.”

Aegis put her arms down. Even a simple task as that became excruciatingly painful because she hadn’t fully recovered from the shock orb. She still pushed past the stinging in her muscles. Vergil prepared another orb and hurled it at her. Aegis closed her eyes and tried to focus on the incoming attack, but it was cut short by another stinging sensation rippling through her chest. She was knocked back, skidding on the grass. Aegis was lying flat on her back, gasping for breath. Vergil shook his head in disapproval.

Vergil continued to hurl orbs at his daughter, Aigis not blocking a single one. She had been struck in the chest, the gut, the arms, the legs, almost every part of her body. Some orbs exploded upon impact, leaving behind black scorch marks on her clothes and skin. With every hit, Aigis had to fight the growing urge to fix her lips and tongue to scream the words “I quit!” or “I can’t do it anymore!” But the words were caught in her throat. She couldn't bring herself to give up, she wanted to prove that she could do it. Vergil didn't look impressed at all, as if he expected this result. But he still demanded more. If her own father wasn't impressed, how was she meant to be powerful enough to guide herself to the Promised Land? How could she ever make it to the Promised Land if she couldn't even do what her father asked of her?

Aigis got up, shaking. She couldn't let this go on. It wasn't fair. She was doing the best she could. Her very first day trying defensive magic. Vergil didn't demonstrate anything, show her any pointers, or even a HINT on how to do it. Blades of grass and dirt coated her dress. She could feel a few blades in her mouth as she desperately tried to spit them out. But they stayed in her mouth, stuck on her teeth and under her tongue. They tasted stale and salty, but the dew gave it an extra glassy texture. Aigis began to hitch and hiccup. She struggled with the urge to cry. If Vergil caught her crying, he'd get mad and yell.

“Can— Can we...?” Aigis hiccuped.

“Can we *what*?” Vergil clapped back. He snapped at her like he somehow knew she wanted to give up. Aigis tried to compose herself, but her lip was quivering and her eyes were glassy.

“C-Can we please t-take a break?”

Vergil stuffed his hands in his trench coat pocket, sighing in disapproval. He stared her down, but Aigis refused to give him the satisfaction of seeing her cry. He finally responded, and it wasn't the answer Aigis wanted.

“We do not take breaks, Aigis. That word shouldn't even be in your vocabulary. The world doesn't stop for anyone. What makes you think it'll stop for a 7-year-old child?”

“Not even for a bit?”

“No. We will be out here for as long as we need to until you start learning the skills you need to master.”

“But we've been out here for so long! Is there a way to learn it faster?” Aigis whined. Vergil rubbed his graying black hair. He didn't want to be out here either. It was cold, it was foggy, and men like him in his forties weren't meant to be getting up this early. But Aigis wouldn't learn if he didn't push her. And the only way he knew how to teach was the way he was taught: hard. He was a man who learned everything through experience, not by someone spoon-feeding it to him. If he were to raise a future Psychokinetic, he would do it right. And that meant being hard on her. He turned around and this time created a 5-yard (4.5 meter) gap between them. Maybe a little life-or-death situation could be what she needed to finally get it right, he thought. He raised his arms in the air and a much bigger, brighter electric orb manifested. It crackled with the sound of thunder. It was so unstable that the random discharges struck a few woodpeckers and sparrows unfortunate enough to be caught in the crossfire, sending them plummeting down into the nearby trees. The birds fell like raindrops, one after the other. Like he was throwing a several-ton wrecking ball, he heaved the giant orb toward her. It was so bright and fast that it was a blur.

Aigis stood there, eyes widened, paralyzed with fear. Her mind was racing a mile a minute. There was no time to think, and no room for error. But what could she do? She failed every time Vergil asked her to do it. She had no idea what an Aurae Shield was. It was an odd name, even for a magical defense spell. She could only think about how much it would hurt if that thing hit her. The orb was getting closer and closer to her. The heat and electricity from the orb felt like they were toasting her skin, but they were still a couple of yards away. It was a matter of seconds before she would be struck.

Instinctually, she shut her eyes and pushed her hands in front of her. She couldn't see the orb coming. But as she outstretched her arms, she felt the wind in front of her flicker. She slowly opened her eyes and saw a light blue, fragmented, ethereal shield faintly flickering in front of her. She did it! She finally blocked it! The orb made contact with the faint shield and they collided, lighting up all of Ruheplatz and slathering the village with sharp, bright lights.

*CRACK!*

The orb exploded and shattered the shield. Aigis felt the brunt of the attack hit her square in the chest. The orb rotated as it spun, so electricity grated itself on her chest like a chainsaw. The impact sent her flying. Her vision was a blurry cascade of sharp white and blue as she barreled backward and slammed against the tree overlooking the Weser. Aigis didn't even attempt to get up. Her face was still planted in the ground, lathered in dew and mud. Her mask faltered completely as she began wailing loudly. Every tear was like a waterfall, and every cry was like a siren. She felt like her whole body was on fire. Vergil grumbled as he trotted over to her to see what she was crying about. He sat her up with one hand. He couldn't tell the dew from the tears. He saw that Aigis was clutching her arm. Vergil yanked it towards himself to see what the issue was. A rosy red mark three-fourths the width of Aigis' arm was branded across her

forearm. It was swollen and puffy. It had been charred in the same area, with a few patches of peeling skin. Likely a broken forearm.

“Welp,” Vergil threw his hands up in surrender. “That’s a bitch.”

“Can we—”

“Yes, you can have that break now.” Vergil grumbled in annoyance.

Yanking Aegis back up on her feet with her uninjured arm. He towed her back inside of the house.

“Couldn’t even last four damn hours out here.”