

— October 5th, 1906. Aigis & Frieda's room, 11:12 A.M. —

Aigis sat upright in her bed with her arm as straight as she could possibly force it. Even the slightest movement would send waves of agony through her. Her breathing was sharp yet shaky, staying as still and rigid as a statue. Beside the bed was Irma and Frieda. Irma held a giant piece of linen cloth she had acquired from somewhere else in the house and was using her chin and arms to hold it. The 24-year-old housemaid had a bubble caught in her throat, hesitant to make her next move. Irma was capable of a lot of things as a maid, but medical expertise wasn't one of them. But one thing Irma did understand was the agony of a broken bone. The sight of Aigis' red, swollen arm gave her a flashback to the summer of 1894 when she was 12 years old. She was sitting on the sidewalk next to a horse carriage waiting for her mom to come out of the store. Some loud noise rang out. Either it was a gunshot or something that sounded similar to it. Irma couldn't recall, but what she did remember was that the horse freaked out and took off, dragging the carriage with it. The wheel ran over her leg, breaking her shin. Irma spent the next month bedridden and unable to even move her left leg without being in excruciating pain. That memory made her sympathize with Aigis.

Frieda, on the other hand, sat on the edge of the bed, holding a book of medical treatments written about six years ago. She wanted to help out Aigis, but Irma gently told her to stand by. She didn't really trust a 6-year-old to delicately handle a broken bone. Still, Aigis had taken care of Frieda many times over the years, and now it was her chance to do the same.

"It says here we have to 'set' the bone. What does that mean?" Frieda asked, not understanding the terminology.

"Oh God," Irma nearly puked. *Setting the bone*. That's what they had to do with her leg before applying the plaster of Paris cast. That was the most painful thing she ever experienced in

her life. And this was a little girl she was dealing with. She gently sat the linen cloth down and gently caressed Aigis' other hand.

"Now Aigis. In order to put your arm in the sling, I have to move it slightly. It might hurt."

"How much?" Aigis whimpered.

"Depends on how much you move during it. Stay as still as possible, okay, Fraulein?"

Aigis nodded, still holding back tears. Irma carefully slid her left hand down her right arm, her hand resting on her forearm. Gently she took a thumb and pressed it, but that made Aigis jump back. Frieda reached out for Aigis' safe arm and latched onto her hand.

"It's okay," Frieda smiled. "I know it's scary, but don't be. Because I'm here with you."

"Thank you." Aigis thanked, albeit still a little shaky.

"If it helps, we can sing something. Singing is always fun."

Frieda started the song, dancing her index fingers around to shift the focus away from Aigis. Aigis watched her fingers, her eyes following them with every sway. Irma, now seeing an opening, carefully grabbed Aigis wrist and forearm and began to gently move her arm.

SLAM!

The door to the girls' room burst wide open and Johanna marched in. Locking eyes onto Aigis' wounded body, she sprinted straight toward her daughter, shoving Irma out of the way.

"My baby!" Johanna pulled Aigis into her arms, squeezing her tightly, kissing her all over the head and face. Aigis screamed, the embrace irritating her arm further.

"Stop it! It hurts, mama!"

Johanna quickly backed away. She took a second look at her daughter and saw that her arm was swollen, and it wasn't normal. The bruising had also grown darker and more intense. She looked back up at Aigis.

“I heard from your father that you got hurt. What happened?”

“We were outside, and— and he was teaching me how to bring up my magic shield. He kept throwing these thunder ball things at me, mama.” Aigis sniveled.

Johanna raised one eyebrow, trying her hardest not to let her twitching face muscles show. “Oh, did he?”

“Then he threw this— this— this GIANT one. I used my shield, but it broke and it hit me. I flew back and my arm hit the tree, and...and...it broke. I couldn't get up, I hurt so much...” Aigis hitched, barely understandable from the sobbing. Johanna exhaled through her nose, both nostrils releasing a tornado of carbon dioxide air. Her teeth were clenched together, grinding and cracking. She extended her hand to Aigis' broken arm. Luminescent Aurae orbs drifted from her fingertips and into Aigis' arm. The red swelling gradually disappeared, the bruising lightened, and her arm straightened, as good as new. Aigis twisted her arm and examined it. The searing pain was now a distant memory. Johanna took both hands and firmly grasped Aigis'.

“Listen to me,” She sternly began. “I don't want you to do any more magic training with your father, you understand me?”

Aigis lowered her head. This was the first time she ever felt the urge to disobey her mother. “But mama, if I don't train, I won't be able to go to The Promised Land.”

Johanna was ready to snap, but she couldn't. It was her own fault. She told Aigis about the Promised Land to get her to train. But she wanted Aigis to restore their people and train. She

didn't want her to work herself to the ground. Of course he would take advantage of her eagerness.

"If he tries to force you to again, tell him no."

"But if I do that, he gets mad and yells at me."

Johanna bit the inside of her mouth. She should've known.. If dictionaries had pictures in them, the word "hardass" would just be a photo of Vergil. She stood up and began to walk out of the room.

"Stay here. I'm going to go talk to your father."

— 30 minutes later, 11:47 A.M. —

Vergil and Johanna sat across from each other. Vergil had a bored look about him. He was slouching in his chair with one arm hanging over the backrest and the other was resting on his leg. Johanna sat there, hands in her lap, staring him down. She hadn't blinked or moved her face at all in over 5 minutes.

"Well, woman?" Vergil said, breaking the silence. "Whatever it is, I hope it was worth interrupting my reading. Books don't read themselves."

"Did you break Aegis' arm this morning?"

Vergil snickered. "Oh, that's what this is about?"

Johanna raised her head slightly, her face growing more serious. "Did you or did you not?"

"Yes," He groaned. "I was throwing energy orbs at her to teach her how to shield herself with her powers. Happy now?"

Disgusting.

"She's a 7-year-old child, Vergil! She's still a beginner!"

“Which is why I’m training her.” Vergil crossed his arms, unimpressed with the interrogation. Johanna rolled her eyes and groaned. She stood up and walked towards the cold stove.

“Don’t you think you’re being a little harsh?”

“Harsh?” He scoffed, using every fiber of his being to not burst into a hysterical laughing fit. “Harsh?! If anything, I’m being generous!”

“Generous...?” Johanna asked, strangely in a calm manner. Her eyes were distant and glassy. She took the button on her left dress sleeve and unbuttoned it. She rolled up her sleeve and revealed her bare arm to Vergil. Her arm was wrapped in a white cloth. She unfastened the cloth and it drifted down to the floor. His neck craned forward, examining her arm. The skin was black, bruised and scarred. Injuries of all kinds were on them. Fire burns, freeze marks, electrical burns, poison wounds, and many more. The scars were deep, some even going past the muscle and into the bone. Vergil’s Adam’s apple bounced up and down as he gulped. He remembered every single one of those scars.

“What’re those?” He feigned ignorance.

“Every time I caught you pushing Aegis too hard, I got these trying to protect her from you. Every. Single. One. You call *that* generous?”

Vergil licked his lips. He moved his arm off of the rest and sat up straight. He opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He closed his mouth and swallowed again.

“Well?”

“She’s not going to get anywhere with you coddling her.”

“‘Coddling’?”

“That’s right!” Vergile exclaimed, pointing to himself. “I was younger than Aigis is now when I was forced to begin MY training! Every day, hours and hours of magic training, no food, no sleep, no breaks! I wasn’t even allowed to have friends! The fact I even *let* Frieda talk to her is an act of unlimited benevolence!”

“So because your parents mistreated you, that gives you the right to abuse my daughter?”

“OUR daughter. Aigis is just as much my daughter as she is yours, and I’m free to do with her as I please. And as the strongest blood of the household, I decide how my children are raised. And as the head of the household, I decide that Aigis will grow strong and keep the Schumacher bloodline.”

Johanna furrowed her brows, but not in an angry way. In a way that said she wasn’t having it. She walked so close to him, their noses were centimeters apart from touching.

“Vergil, did you just say... *children*?”

He was taken aback. His eyes darted across the dining area. The moment even an ember of a cover-up popped up in his mind, he immediately snuffed it out. He adjusted his brown necktie and slicked his hair back.

“I have to continue my reading.” He coughed before walking into the living area. Johanna bent over and picked up the bloody cloth hiding the hideous scars on her left arm. That slip. That one slip. The tingling from her arm moved over to her chest. Everything she was thinking over the past 8 years was just proven by that one word: *children*.