**Monster**

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**Summary**

This night was supposed to be about the girls, because they were all sick of the men in their lives. Lucy, Cana and Levy decide to spend a night out at the club for some girl time. Levy’s aim was to forget about her troubles for a little while, but the only way to do that is by getting herself into a different kind of trouble. She is in the sights of a monster, should she be afraid, or excited by this? One thing is for sure... After this night, things will never be the same for her again.

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**Notes**

First of all, this is an alternative universe fic, where the characters are not mages and they are also a little older and live in a more modern day society. Think early twenties, as Levy, Lucy and Cana are almost finished with college. This is mostly going to be a Gajeel x Levy fic, but I will also be including LuLo in honor of my fellow writer friend. There is mention of Lucy having feelings for Natsu, but there isn’t plans of NaLu necessarily being romantic past that point, although I’m not closed off to the idea either. I just want people to be aware, I’m not trying to lead anyone on. Gruvia and Jerza will also be included in later chapters, but they
won’t be as prevalent as Gajeel and Levy. This is a Gajevy driven plot, but all ships will have a meaningful role or purpose in the story that ties to their plot.

Initially I didn’t have plans for this to be a very long story. In fact, when I first dreamt it up it was just going to be a one shot, but I realized pretty quickly while writing the first chapter that it was going to be far too long. Once I figured this out, I then made plans for the story to be completed upon the conclusion of chapter 7, but as I worked my way up to this point, I realized I had set a lot of groundwork for something far bigger. I had always thought I might continue it and make the story a full-blown, novel-sized project and after getting the opinions of my readers, I decided to do just that. So please know that this is going to be very long and it is still ongoing. I can’t tell you just yet, when the conclusion is coming or the full length, because I don’t know how many chapters it will take for me to get to it. Just know that I do plan on getting there, but it might take a lot of time. It’s already taken me over 2 years to get where I am now, life doing its part to slow me down, but that’s okay… I have faith in my continued journey to the destination, despite the harsh detours.

Also, a warning, this fic will end up being very graphic, sexual and just an all-around darker themed story including, but not limited to such situations like sexual assault/near rape (nobody actually gets raped), language, abuse, tragedy, extreme violence and torture. Thus, the high rating. I promise to keep the narrative as entertaining and tasteful as I can, even while dealing with such questionable topics, but either way I need people to be aware. Just please take that into consideration before reading this, because if you don’t handle these topics too well, then this just may not be the story for you. It certainly isn’t for the faint of heart, what with its current content and also with what is to come in future chapters.

And lastly, be warned that there may be errors, as much as I’ve toiled over this thing, I’m sure I will still miss stuff. It is very long and I usually do all of my own editing. It is exhausting and I wouldn’t say I excel at it.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1: Weight

The club outing tonight had been arranged as a means to escape the building pressures of the senior semester. They had wanted to relax and have a good time, but more than anything they had wanted to get away from men. At least that had been the plan seeing as all three girls were fed up with the ones in their lives. Cana had, had it with her father who had disappeared once again, without so much as a word to her.

As important and influential as Gildarts was it seemed like he never took anything seriously. His name was one of the most well known in Magnolia, because he was both a former hero and entrepreneur of the town alongside an old man by the name of Makarov. The two of them had even opened up the town’s university together, but Gildarts had grown bored of the businessman life style. It had never really suited his taste to begin with, but he hadn’t anything better to do while in recovery after losing his leg. That and he had managed to come across a lot of money after being injured in action. Now that he was fully recovered and had adjusted to his new limb, he spent his days traveling in the name of charity as a means to escape it all.

He had basically left Makarov to deal with all of their business dealings and as for Cana? Well he hadn’t known he had a daughter at first, but once he found out, he made sure that she was well taken care of. He had even given her, her own card with access to one of his many bank accounts, as well as paid for all of her schooling as she attended the university him and Makarov had created. The only issue was Cana hadn’t wanted to be taken care of.

All she had truly desired was to spend time with the man she had always known was her father. Now that he knew the truth she had hoped things would be different, but it wasn’t looking that way, as she one day discovered that Gildarts had left again. He had taken nothing, but cash and the clothes on his back. He had left his small modest cabin open for her to stay in while he was gone, but…

None of that filled the gaping hole Cana felt inside and so that was why; that was why it had been her brilliant idea that the three of them have a girl’s night, because Gildarts was funding it.

Levy and Lucy weren’t really the ‘partying’ type of girls. A fun evening for them usually consisted of reading or having a movie night together. Maybe sometimes they would go out, but not to the types of places Cana liked to frequent. They probably would have both backed out, if they hadn’t picked up on the fact that Cana was upset and thus, they did not want to let her be alone. They were all friends and classmates after all. Cana had overheard the two best friends venting to each other one day while sitting in the school’s small cafè between classes.
Lucy was also upset with her father as he continued to harass her about finishing her degree at Makarov’s school, seeing as he wasn’t a fan of the tiny old man. Jude Heartfilia was another wealthy entrepreneur from another town and he found Master Makarov’s unorthodox way of doing business, degrading. He had refused to help Lucy financially, that included helping her pay for any of her schooling or signing any of her loans seeing, as she had chosen a school he didn’t approve of.

Jude had hoped by cutting Lucy off she would do what he wanted, but his plan hadn’t had the desired affects in the slightest. If anything, his idea had just driven Lucy to defy him even further by stirring up some great ambition inside of her, to prove she didn’t need any of his money, nor approval to get what she wanted. She had even gone so far as to fund herself completely by taking out all of her own loans and by signing up for any financial aid, as well as scholarships that she could. Not only that, but she worked her hands to the bone in an effort to survive and continue to pay her way through school all on her own.

All of this for three years and now that she was finally nearing graduation, her father just wouldn’t leave her be. Instead of congratulating Lucy, he responded by fighting with her and arguing with her every chance he got. Constantly calling, leaving her angry voicemails. It had left the poor girl, who was already stressed out from finals and work, completely burnt out.

All of this may have been all right, seeing as Lucy was used to her dad’s negative attitude and could usually bounce back, but unfortunately, he wasn’t the only issue she was having with men right now. The other major problem that had really been eating at her, was with her best friend Natsu Dragneel. Ever since he had started dating Lisanna Strauss, another student at their school for the past month, it was like he never made time for her anymore.

Now Lucy was somewhat understanding of this, seeing as the two of them had finally gotten together after years of Natsu always liking the flaxen haired beauty; so, in truth there was a large part of her that was very happy for him, for both of them, but at the same time she couldn’t seem to help the fact that it still hurt her as well. Especially right now, when she needed his support more than ever, what with all the fighting she had been doing with her father.

Natsu had always been the one she turned too whenever things with her father got this serious, but now it was like he couldn’t spare her the time of day. Every time she texted him he would either say he was out with Lisanna or he just wouldn’t respond for hours. When he finally would get back to her, he would always apologize. Indicating that he did feel bad for blowing her off, but not enough to leave his new girlfriend’s side, long enough to allow Lucy to lean on him for a bit. She was pretty torn up about the whole thing, but she tried to put on a brave front most of the time.

Levy had been able to see through this though, as she was Lucy’s best girlfriend. She had kind of figured out that Lucy had feelings for Natsu. Feelings that were beyond that of friendship a while ago and so she knew the blond was actually heartbroken beneath it all. After some clever wordplay, she had managed to get Lucy to confirm her suspicions that day at the café, but that also included the lengthily rant about her father as well. That had been the part Cana had overheard the two girls going on about, when she had approached them. It was, because of all of this that Lucy had been the first one to jump on board with Cana’s ‘let’s go out and forget about men’ plan when she had flashed the two girls her shiny, Gildart’s signed credit card.

Levy had been a bit harder to convince even though she was no different with her current attitude towards the opposite sex at the moment. Her issues stemmed from two very lovesick best friends, whom also loved to argue and fight over her any chance they got, especially lately. Things were reaching a whole new level of crazy though, for the weekend prior they had actually made a scene in
public on the quad, throwing punches at each other. Not only did they nearly get the cops called on
them, but people had gotten the wrong impression of her now too. Levy had started to notice people
looking at her funny ever since that day and whispering things, all suspecting her of leading both of
them on or having some odd swinger relationship with the two of them.

Levy wasn’t pleased with the attention at all. She preferred the quiet life style, but now everyone at
school seemed to know who she was. Not only that, but it had gotten much worse. Guys had started
approaching her with cheap pick-up lines. The really suggestive kind that made it clear they were
only after one thing, as if they thought she could be a quick notch on their belts. It had left poor Levy
mortified and furious with Jet and Droy, the two friends responsible. She hadn’t spoken to them all
week, but it hadn’t stopped them from following her around and begging for her forgiveness every
chance they got. As if only to make her more embarrassed, by making it seem like everything people
were saying about the three of them, was indeed true.

It was making her crazy inside, because she couldn’t study in peace anymore. One day she had even
had some guy sneak up behind her and slap her ass, before running away. This was probably one of
the more embarrassing moments of her life. She had turned around red faced but hadn’t been able to
spot who it had been, as they had quickly ducked away among the crowds of people. She did
however, hear the culprit’s laughter echoing somewhere behind her.

She knew it would all blow over eventually and people would soon forget, but as of now, the
harassment was making her life a living hell, so if there was any time a girl could be convinced to go
out and get drunk, it was probably right now.

Cana had promised Levy and Lucy that she knew a great place where nobody from their school
frequented, so they would be safe from embarrassment with anyone who mattered. The girls had still
been pretty uneasy about the whole plan, especially where Levy was concerned and weren’t
completely sold on it until Cana had told them they would also be getting their nails done and would
be buying new clothes for the occasion all courtesy of Gildarts money, unbeknownst to him of
course. It was hard to say no to that tall order, especially when Cana was so convincing. She had
somehow manipulated it, to make it sound like they would be doing her old man a favor by
accompanying her, as she blew some of his money away.

That afternoon they had spent the whole day shopping, getting their nails done and even made time
for a big lunch. Once all of that was done they all went their separate ways, returning back home to
their individual apartments, to waste time getting ready, before they all met up again to go out.

Cana had agreed to let them use her car, so long as Lucy agreed to be the one driving it, with plans
of not being sober later, unbeknownst to the other two girls. Lucy naively agreed, taking possession
of the keys and now here the three of them were at the club. Surrounded by moving bodies with
bright neon colors bouncing off of their faces in the dim lighting.

Well, really it was just the two of them, because Cana had already ditched Lucy and Levy for a
crowd of men at the bar. The ‘girl’s night’ plan hadn’t lasted more than twenty minutes; all Cana had
said was that she was going to grab a drink and then she never came back to the dance floor.
Leaving Levy and Lucy like two lost puppies in a sea of warm bodies, both of them clinging to each
other among the crowded space as if they were each other’s security blanket.
Levy had one of her hands gripping to Lucy’s elbow and Lucy in return had her hand on Levy’s
shoulder. Both of them were tense as they attempted to dance amongst the overwhelming heat and
smell of sweat. Their bodies being pushed to and fro by the other dancers, who didn’t mind where
they were going. The whole situation made both girls very uneasy and it didn’t help that neither of
them had touched a drop of alcohol since they had arrived, unlike the rest of the people dancing.

Finally, one large tan shirtless body came crashing into Levy’s back so hard it propelled her small
frame forward. Luckily, she ran into Lucy, who caught the smaller girl before she completely lost her
balance and hit the floor, but for Lucy this was the last straw. All of her patience had thinned. The
blonde’s brow lowered and her fist clenched. She moved Levy aside gently, before reaching up to
the large man who had crashed into her.

Her hand came slamming down onto his shoulder, causing him to turn around with a confused look
on his face. Lucy paused for a moment, surprised by his odd appearance, almost forgetting to speak
as he raised a dark thin eyebrow at her. It was his crazy hair that had caught her off guard; it was split
into two colors, red on the left and white on the right. Once she got over the initial shock of that, she
quickly remembered how annoyed she was.

“Hey! What gives! You almost knocked over my friend-” The furious blond began to shout at him,
pointing to Levy who stood there shyly, clearly looking embarrassed by the whole scene Lucy was
creating. “With your mosh pitting or whatever the hell you were doing! Will you watch where you
are going?!” Lucy finished, her tone only growing. The guy Lucy was yelling at, only blinked in
response, almost as if he were confused. His face was dripping with sweat and his eyes were
bloodshot. It was clear he had been drinking. His mouth opened as Lucy gave him a death stare, but
he didn’t get a chance to say anything, because someone else decided to step in instead.

“Watch it bitch! I know you’re not talking to MY boyfriend like that!” A fierce woman’s voice
snapped, as two pale arms suddenly wrapped around the tan man’s tattooed bicep. Two angry blue
eyes suddenly appeared from behind the man. The glare this woman shot Lucy, more than rivaled
her own angry stare. The taller woman had long light blue hair, that stretched down to her waistline.
Lucy didn’t appear intimidated, but Levy on the other hand, was on the verge of sneaking away from
the commotion, fearful of what might happen next. She didn’t need another situation like the
weekend before, falling over her again and plus she disliked conflict.

“Oh yes I was! He should watch where he’s going! He nearly trampled my friend!” Lucy shouted as
she pointed again to Levy, who had been slowly slinking away, but then stopped. The tiny girl’s face
was growing red as the crowd that had formed around their small group, thanks to Lucy’s outburst,
turned their attention to her at that moment. The angry blue haired woman didn’t remove her eyes
from Lucy as she slowly let go of her boyfriend’s arm, so that she could step up closer, to the clearly
shorter blond.

“Ya know what…. it’s fine! Really, Lucy! I’m fine, we’re fine, just let it go…” Levy started
stuttering nervously, as Lucy and the blue haired woman gave each other an intense stare down.

“Look blondie.” The blue haired woman began, making Lucy’s jaw drop in outrage. “I get that
you’re not from around here, but you don’t want to mess with me.” She finished her voice cold and
deadly. Lucy stared into her dark blue eyes. Sweat had formed on her brow and her fist were shaking
at her sides, out of both anger and some slight fear. This woman was intimidating, to the say the
least, but she just couldn’t quite grasp why.

The blue haired woman smirked as she could see Lucy’s resolve breaking under her tough exterior.
At this point, Levy had approached Lucy and was tugging on her arm.

“Come on... Lucy…” Levy was mumbling as her eyes glanced around nervously. “Just let it go... I wanna take a break from dancing anyways…” The woman suddenly backed away from Lucy’s face and chuckled to herself arrogantly. She flipped a hand through her long hair, as she turned her back to Lucy in a rather defiant action.

“That’s right, listen to your friend. Walk away little girl, before you get hurt.” At this Lucy was grinding her teeth, her anger making it too difficult for her to get any coherent sentences out.

“Why?! You! I! I’m! Gah!” The blond was spitting as she waved an arm at the blue haired woman’s back. The woman just laughed again at the furious blonde’s reaction and then she smirked at her from over her shoulder.

“Now go and find yourself a man. Maybe it will help with that attitude of yours.” Lucy dropped her fist at this and stood there flabbergasted, her feet no longer planted, allowing Levy to finally succeed in dragging her taller, blond friend away.

“Hey!” Lucy began to shout as Levy continued to pull and drag her away, finally getting her wits about her. “I don’t need a man! Bitch!” She added, just as the blue haired woman had disappeared from view behind the crowd, still dawning that same arrogant smirk. People were looking at them as Lucy’s loud voice resounded in the air and her arms waved in anger, making Levy duck her head some as if to hide, as she continued to drag her riled friend a safe distance away.

Finally, Levy had managed to find a small clearing far away from the dance floor, before she stopped walking. It was a lot less crowded in this area and people had finally stopped looking at them. Also, the speakers were no longer right on top of them, so now they could actually hear each other talk without having to yell. Levy let go of Lucy’s wrist and turned towards her, letting out a breath. Lucy stood there, looking defeated as she hung her head and arms. Levy glanced up at her friend sympathetically and reached a hand out to the blonde’s shoulder.

“It’s okay Lu.” Levy chimed in cheerfully, trying to lighten the mood, but all she earned was a disbelieving glare in return.

“How can you say that Levy? That guy nearly took you out!” Lucy replied making Levy just laugh modestly as Lucy stood up straight, her arms folding grumpily.

“It’s okay! You tried to defend me…” Levy let her hand tap on Lucy’s shoulder. “That’s what counts.” She added with a large smile at the blond. Lucy let out an accepting breath at Levy’s words.

“Yea… I guess… What a bitch that woman was! They were the ones in the wrong! Then the nerve of her telling me I need a man! That’s the LAST thing I need right now! I’m sick of men!” The blond replied as if exasperated.

Levy just smiled at her friend sorrowfully, before her eyes suddenly widened as if a new thought had just struck her. Levy’s lips curled up deviously, as she tapped on Lucy’s shoulder again, causing the blonde’s brown eyes to dawn her with an unsuspecting look.

“You have to admit it though—” One of Levy’s eyes was closing as she winked at Lucy, her sly smile growing into a full out grin. “Finding one here wouldn’t be so bad!” Lucy just blinked at Levy for the moment, taking in the girl’s carefree smile; clearly Levy was joking, right?

“What’re you... getting at Levy?” Lucy asked cautiously, confused by the statement. At this
question, Levy’s eyes rolled around the room slowly, as if she was trying to approach the subject innocently.

“Well… Don’t get me wrong.” Her eyes landed back on Lucy. “I’m sick of men too, but at the same timmmmee.” She responded dragging the last word out. “It wouldn’t be so bad…” Now her words were coming out slow and hesitant and Lucy could see her cheeks turning a slight shade of pink. “If… ya know… Just for tonight I mean… Just this once-” Again Levy’s words were stuttering out and she was shaking her head and hands now. “Not any other time! Or ever again! Not ever, ever again!” Her words were coming out defensively before she could even really say anything. “Just ya know like a, a…”

“Spit it out already!” Lucy cried out with an eyebrow raised, as she was becoming impatient by Levy’s hesitant build up.

“A hook up!” Levy finally spat, her cheeks now going from a soft shade of pink to clearly red, at her own words.

Lucy just stared at Levy for a moment, completely dumb founded, because she could see Levy had been playing it off as a joke at first, but then she could sense that a small part of her was serious too. A hook up? Once she got over the initial shock that Levy had actually said that to her, the idea of it began to take form in the blonde’s head. This form consisting of erotic images that began to bounce around Lucy’s brain, before she could even really stop them and within seconds, her face had become an even brighter shade of red, than even Levy’s. Her brown eyes were averting upwards from the awkwardness of the moment.

“Uhhh… Lucy?” Levy questioned.

“Levy! What’s gotten into you?!” Lucy suddenly snapped. Her eyes were landing back down to Levy’s, her face was still very clearly red. At this reaction Levy, couldn’t help, but chuckle softly at her exasperated and embarrassed friend.

“Is it really all that crazy, that’d I say that?” Levy asked her friend, her words now coming out normal sounding. Lucy glanced up at Levy clearly puzzled, her face still red, but the color was finally beginning to fade.

“Well… Yea. That’s just not you.” Lucy said, her voice calm now, as Levy averted her eyes downwards. Levy’s expression looked a bit sad, but she was still smiling weakly.

“You’re right…” She glanced back up to Lucy, who was now looking at her as if she was a bit concerned. “I’m just lonely is all.” She stated honestly as she looked back down. “I haven’t had a boyfriend in ages and I can’t remember the last time I went on a date, let alone had sex… I have kind of stopped keeping track, as the months have gone by, what with school and all… It’s kept me pretty busy and preoccupied… But… Not enough to make me forget it all of the time.” She glanced up at Lucy, her large doe eyes looking even sadder now. “I’m sorry, that was a stupid thing to say.”

Lucy could feel her heart crumbling into a ball at Levy’s words, because she felt the exact same way. She reached a hand out and rested it on Levy’s shoulder this time and shook her head.

“No, no it’s not. I understand where you’re coming from Levy.”

“You do?”

“Yea… I haven’t had a date in forever either… And it’s not like I don’t get asked or anything.” Lucy took her hand back and let it run through her golden hair slowly and awkwardly. “I just… I don’t
know… I feel like maybe I always turn them down, because they’re not what I’m looking for.” Lucy paused for a moment, her eyes looking off and even sadder. “It’s like I make excuses for myself. This guy is too loud, this guy is too tall, this guy likes stuff I hate, ya know?” Her hand finally fell back down to her side limply as if defeated. “Stupid things like that, that don’t even make sense… Then I tell myself I’ll know when I find the guy I really want… But until then, I’d like to skip over all of this dating random people stuff. Save myself the heartache and pain of break ups and let downs and just get to the real thing.” Lucy’s chocolate eyes glanced back up at Levy who was watching her intensely, hanging on the blonde’s every word.

“Oh yea?” Levy uttered. Lucy shook her head, frustrated by her own musings as she revealed them to Levy.

“Yes!” She answered as if about ready to pull her own hair out, “But the even dumber thing is, I thought I did find him…! But it just so turns out… That he is in love with someone else and always has been! And now! Now they’re together! Happily, I might add…” Lucy finished, her voice going soft now, as it was her turn to look forlorn. Sad thoughts were beginning to completely consume her. Levy matched Lucy with her own sympathetic look this time.

“You really miss Natsu, huh?” The blue haired girl asked. The blond just nodded her head as she stared at her own feet, before glancing back up.

“I feel so stupid Levy…. I knew how he felt about her and yet it didn’t stop me from falling for him anyways… He is my best friend.” She raised her hands again with frustration. “And here I am keeping myself from moving on… When I can’t even spend time with him.” She matched eyes with Levy again. “It’s like I choose to put myself through this pain, just so I can see him happy, but I won’t let myself be.” At this Levy looked down to the floor, as she could feel the tears threatening to spill at Lucy’s sincere and sad confession, but she swallowed it down, determined to not break for Lucy’s sake.

“Happiness is fleeting-“ Levy spoke before bringing her head back up. “Especially when you’ve got so much stress on your shoulders.” She finished. Lucy looked back up at Levy and they both exchanged a certain look as they let it all sink in for a moment. Then Lucy suddenly tilted her head and squinted her eyelids at Levy.

“Say, I told you my reasons for not dating, but how come you don’t? I mean… you can’t tell me, you don’t get asked. I mean heck, I know you have been approached a lot this week… Even if it was stressing you out, it still happened.” Lucy suddenly asked as if the thought had just occurred to her.

“Well… They weren’t exactly asking me out.” Levy stated flatly. “More like just implying that they wanted to have sex with me.” She added. Lucy couldn’t help but smile awkwardly.

“Jeeze… It’s really that bad, huh?” Lucy questioned as Levy smiled and looked to her feet, before looking back up at Lucy with a sigh.

“Yea… It’s okay though. I know it will blow over soon, but for the time being it sucks.” Levy replied, causing Lucy to giggle.

“If you’re not interested in any of these guys who want to sleep with you, then why are you talking about hooking up?! It doesn’t make any sense!” Levy’s cheeks flushed up again at Lucy’s point-blank question and her hazel eyes shifted around the room awkwardly for a moment, before answering.

“Well it’s just…” Levy’s head bobbed, as did her feet, as her eyes looked off in the distance. “I don’t want anyone like that.” As the words left her mouth, she glanced back to Lucy’s perplexed face and
she could plainly see that the blond didn’t understand what she meant by that statement. She knew
she needed to elaborate, but it was just hard to find the right words to explain it in a way that could
make sense. “What I mean is… I don’t want anyone who has anything to do with my life right now.”
Lucy’s eyes narrowed in on Levy at the odd phrasing and her head tilted even more in confusion.

“Okay… I don’t think I’m quite grasping this all just yet… I know you can’t mean Jet and Droy.”
Levy bounced again on her heels, her anxiety was building as she shook her head.

“No, I wasn’t referring to them at all. You know where I stand with those two; they’re like brothers
to me, even if they don’t feel the same way and want more.” Levy retorted as she rolled her eyes, her
mind drifting back to the incident and all of the misery it had caused her. Yep, she was still quite
irritated with her two best friends. She shook her head again, in an attempt to get her mind off of it,
as she tried once again to explain herself better to Lucy. “What I mean is, I don’t want anyone who is
even remotely involved or related to my life.” She glanced down at her hand and began naming
fingers. “I don’t want it to be someone I’m friends with, someone I work with, someone who even
goes to our school. I don’t even want it to be someone I share the bus with!” She exclaimed
seriously. “That way it can never come back to haunt me. That way it could be a one and done kind
of deal and I won’t ever have to worry about the repercussions of having to see that person again.”

Lucy was staring at Levy as if she had grown a second head now; everything she was saying now
made complete and perfect sense, with one major exception. This was Levy… And she was saying
she wanted to have a one-night stand.

None of that made any sense at all! Levy wasn’t like that; she wasn’t the type of girl who was just
out for a good time. She was hard working, she was smart, she avoided conflict and trouble, and she
was a good girl who wanted love, not just sex. At least as far as Lucy had always known. What the
hell was going on?

“Levy…?” Lucy uttered out. “Do you understand what you’re saying?”

“Yes Lucy…” Levy answered, her voice frustrated. “I’m saying I just want to have sex with
someone, because I’m incredibly lonely and have given up on trying to find someone to be with. I’ve
got way too much on my plate right now to try and be in a relationship anyways. I’m incredibly
stressed out and in the meantime, it would just be nice to feel somewhat satisfied for once!” Levy
suddenly ranted out, almost as if she was annoyed. “I know the risk and such. I’m not stupid, but
don’t you worry Lucy, because I’m not going to do it anyways! We both know I don’t have it in me
to actually do any of it!” Levy finished, her frustration peaking.

“Whoa hang on Levy! I don’t-” Lucy started saying, but Levy held up a hand.

“Just stop, it’s fine.” Levy said, her voice going soft now, as she felt bad for getting so upset. “I
understand you’re just worried about me Lu, but I can take care of myself. I may say crazy things
once in a while, but you know I’m not actually going to go through with any of my silly ideas.” She
said, her tone back to normal now and her large eyes shined at the blond with unshed tears and Lucy
could see the hopelessness there in them. “I’m sorry… It’s just we’re here… And…” Levy said
looking around with her hands open and out before they fell back to her sides. “We don’t know
anyone on this side of town and…” She looked back up to Lucy. “Well, you know, if I ever was
going to do it… Here and now… This would be the time and place to go for it.” Levy finished, her
eyes looking off and then she began to laugh bitterly, leaving Lucy to just stare at her for a moment.

Lucy kind of felt guilty for judging Levy so harshly in that moment. Everything she was saying was
really not all that crazy, for anyone else at least. Cana did that sort of thing on a regular basis. It was
just that she had never expected to hear anything like that come from Levy’s mouth. But… Alas
there was a small part of her after hearing all of Levy’s explanations, that kind of agreed. A hot one
night didn’t sound so bad right now… Even if she was sick of men.

“It’s okay Levy.” Lucy began, after a long pause as Levy still held the same bitter smile. “We could all stand to get some action a little more often.” Lucy suddenly stated, making Levy now be the one to blink at Lucy. “And honestly, you’re right!” The blond exclaimed as her hands went up. “We are in the right place to do it!” At this, the tension between the two of them was starting to ease, as she could see Levy starting to smile, her cute genuine smile. “I mean honestly, some time you and I ought to take a page from Cana’s book, am I right? What the hell is that girl reading anyways?” Lucy added with a large grin on her face, finally earning a laugh from her smaller friend.

“I don’t know, but I’m sure I’ve read it.” Levy added jokingly and then they both began to laugh lightly this time. It was at this point, once Lucy’s laughter died, that the blond began to glance around as if looking for someone.

“Say speaking of Cana… I wonder where she went off too?” The blond spoke, her words trailing off

“Oh yeal!” Levy replied her head suddenly moving around as if she too was looking. “She’s gotta be around here somewhere.”

“Ya think maybe we should go look for her now?” Lucy asked. There was a long pause as Lucy waited for Levy’s response, her chocolate eyes shifting around in search of their misplaced friend. “Levy…?” Lucy finally glanced up at Levy, as she realized the smaller girl wasn’t listening to her anymore.

Levy was standing there, stone faced, her hazel eyes looking uneasy as her eyebrows pushed together in worry. Her head and eyes were darting around as if she was also searching for something and she was… She just wasn’t sure what it was just yet. She had just had this odd feeling come over her that she couldn’t quite explain, her chest felt heavy all of the sudden and Lucy was looking at her puzzled.

“Levy?” Lucy tried again, finally pulling the smaller girl’s attention back towards her as she saw Levy’s eyes land back on her. “You… alright?” Levy regarded Lucy with a blank expression and wide eyes. She wasn’t exactly sure on how to answer the question, because she couldn’t quite explain the odd feeling, that was suddenly coming over her, so she opted for just nodding her head instead.

“Yea.” Levy lied curtly. “I’m fine. Just wondering where Cana is.” She replied simply, as her eyes began to dart around the room once again. Lucy tilted her head and blinked, not fully believing her, because of the way Levy had been acting the whole entire night thus far. But then she quickly settled for not pushing the subject any further at the moment. Her concern for the missing Cana outweighing whatever it was that seem to be bugging Levy this time. Plus, Lucy didn’t want to risk upsetting her again, now that Levy seemed to be feeling somewhat better. “Okay… Yea ya know what? I’ll just find her and then maybe we can get going. What do ya say?” This finally seemed to get Levy’s attention, as her eyes settled back on Lucy with a more serious look.

“You sure that’s what you want?” Levy asked quickly, her eyes glancing upwards again. Lucy shot Levy another odd perplexed look, before just shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head.

“I don’t know! I’m not having a whole lot of fun and I can tell…” Lucy’s words began to trail off, as her brow lowered in confusion. Levy seemed to be staring at something, but what…? She didn’t know. “You aren’t.” The blond uttered the last few words softly, causing Levy to glance down suspiciously. Lucy was then turning her head obviously, in an effort to look in the direction that her
peculiar friend had been looking. She then looked back to Levy, with an eyebrow raised, after bluntly trying to see whatever it was, Levy had, had her eye on. “What is it?” Lucy finally staggered out in confusion. Levy matched her eyes, with Lucy’s chocolate ones and then narrowed them.

“Not sure… Don’t worry about it.” Levy answered, this time not bothering to hide it.

“You seem worried though.” Lucy stated and Levy just shook her head.

“No… I’m fine. Please don’t end the night early on my account. It’s not like we get to do this often.” Levy spoke glancing back up at Lucy sympathetically. The blond rested her hands, on Levy’s shoulders and she looked at her sincerely.

“Levy, you can tell me what’s up and I promise you it’s fine.” She said with a smile. “I’m actually just sorry Cana and I dragged you out here with us.” This made Levy’s eyes shift back down sadly again.

“No it’s okay Lu… I think I’m done talking for one night anyways. Pretty sure I’ve done enough of that to you all week.” Levy stated laughing awkwardly with a weak smile as Lucy let go of her shoulders and then let her hands slap back down to her own sides, as she rolled her eyes.

“Yea well, I kinda thought Cana would… Ya know… Hang out with us or something! Wish she had… Then maybe we would be having more fun, ya know?” She said, her voice dry, before she looked back up to Levy with one last weak smile. “Maybe I should go check the bar? That’s where she said she was going. What if she’s in trouble or something?” At this Levy just nodded in understanding.

“True, we really should try and find her. Maybe I’ll go check the bathroom or something?” Levy asked, but Lucy just shook her head.

“Mmm…. Maybe you should just wait here.” Lucy suggested, her arms going out to Levy. “Don’t get me wrong. I just don’t want to lose you in this crowd. This place is huge and you’re so small… At least if you stay put I’ll know where to find you.”

“I get what you’re saying… I’ll just wait here then.” Levy replied.

“Okay! I promise I won’t be long.” Lucy stated as she began to walk away leaving Levy to watch the blonde’s retreating back, until the crowd swallowed her whole. “I’ll be right back!” Was the last thing she could hear coming from Lucy’s mouth.

As soon as Lucy was gone, Levy felt her whole-body heave as if she was letting out a breath she had been holding in for forever. Her eyes transfixed to the floor as the air left her lungs in a forlorn sigh, that left her feeling almost lifeless. This night had been a mistake. The whole thing was just one big mess and now all she felt was guilt, for spilling out all of her own frustrations with herself onto Lucy in the manner that she had. Especially when Lucy was going through her own troubles and it wasn’t as if Levy hadn’t already gotten her chance to vent to the blond. Hell, she had been ranting to Lucy all week about her issues, seeing as she wasn’t on speaking terms with Jet and Droy; so then why again tonight, and about far worse things?

Levy was really wishing she could take back, what she said about the one nightstand. She had initially said it as a joke, but at the same time it was something that had been on her mind lately. Poking at her subconscious, every night when she went to bed, keeping her from finding sleep to the
point where she would need to go find a book to read, just to exhaust herself further.

It hadn’t been anything she planned on sharing with anyone, it was personal and she had originally planned on keeping it that way. But she had been too bold in making that joke, because Lucy knew her too well. Lucy had been able to read the sincerity behind it and so Levy had been caught. Thus, her frustrations came pouring out, successfully ruining what was supposed to be a fun night and making her poor heartbroken friend feel sorry for her. She hadn’t been looking for sympathy, but she was just so sick of herself. She felt so lost when faced with the reality of her own situation, which was, that she was never brave enough to go after the things she truly wanted in life. That’s what this all boiled down too and it was probably the whole reason why she was alone, or at least that’s what she believed.

Levy had always been careful. Getting hurt in past relationships and experiencing great losses had only strengthened this trait about her. To the point that this carefulness she carried, seemed to crawl over into other aspects of her life as well. She was very aware of how unlike Lucy and Cana she was.

In her eyes, her two friends were more successful at taking charge of their own lives. Lucy was, by not allowing her dad to hinder her choices and Cana always did what she wanted, consequences be damned! She never let anything stop her from going after the things she wanted. Even when it was about getting the truth about her identity to her father.

Levy found these qualities in her friends admirable and she often wished she could be more like them, but she just didn’t seem to have the same grit that they did. She was small and this small frame of hers was like a metaphor for the way she lived her life. Lost among the crowd, outshined and overshadowed by those who were bigger than her. Careful and modest, so that way she wouldn’t misstep, because she couldn’t withstand a fall like they could. She would end up shattering, where as they would stay intact and so she needed to be clever to get by. She always felt like she was reaching, struggling just to earn her place among all of the bigger people in the world.

Levy could feel these hopeless thoughts cascading around her small body, as her feet stood firmly on the club floor, large eyes still downcast. The emotions were taking hold of her heart, making her want to just crawl into a hole, but she stood there frozen, almost too afraid to budge.

Afraid? Her mind questioned the word… Or scared? That word was the true answer. It was the real reason why she was so stoic and careful. Why she could say crazy things, but not act upon them, even if she so desired it. She let fear rule her; she could feel it in the pit of her stomach, like a wave of darkness that overshadowed her whole being. It was the whole reason why she could suddenly feel her heart thumping hard against her ribcage; she could feel heat filling her cheeks, as her eyes widened. Her brain was manifesting the darkness that always hovered over her, on the wooden planks of the floor she was staring at.

There it was, personified, and literally hanging over her, swallowing her shadow into its own darkness. It was almost too perfect; to literally see the metaphor for how she always felt, performed before her very eyes. But how? How could it be? Levy started to raise a thin eyebrow. Am I going crazy? Her mind suddenly questioned, as she stared at the shadow on the floor and that was when she heard a voice.

Deep and dark, rough like heavy sandpaper and yet full of fortitude. It was the kind of voice that one could never forget once heard, and she had most definitely heard it. He made sure to keep his tone low, so that only she could hear him. Breathing the words out like a soft growl in her ear.

“Hey shrimp.” It was his shadow that had engulfed hers, as he stood over her back. His large body slightly hunched over, so that his head was hovering just above her ear, creating a cold feeling within
her, that ran down her spine as her large doe eyes went even larger.

No… She was thinking. How could he be here? That odd feeling, she had been having before Lucy disappeared to find Cana had returned, as she could suddenly feel that crushing weight on her chest once again. She knew what it was, that she had been looking for now. It was almost as if she had sensed him there, watching her and now here he was. And all Levy could think was, what does he want?

Chapter End Notes

Look at him, look at me
That boy is bad
And honestly
He’s a wolf in disguise
But I can stop staring in those evil eyes

I asked my girlfriend if she’d seen you round before
She mumbled something while we got down on the floor baby
We might’ve fucked not really sure, don’t quite recall
But something tells me that I’ve seen him, yeah

That boy is a monster
M-M-M-Monster
That boy is a monster
M-M-M-Monster
That boy is a monster
M-M-M-Monster
Er-er-er-er

He ate my heart
(I love that girl)
He ate my heart
(Wanna talk to her, she’s hot as hell)

He licked his lips
Said to me
Girl you look good enough to eat
Put his arms around me
Said “Boy now get your paws right off me”

I asked my girlfriend if she’d seen you round before
She mumbled something while we got down on the floor baby
We might’ve fucked not really sure, don’t quite recall
But something tells me that I’ve seen him, yeah

That boy is a monster
M-M-M-Monster
That boy is a monster
M-M-M-Monster
That boy is a monster
M-M-M-Monster
Er-er-er-er

He ate my heart
(I love that girl)
He ate my heart
(Wanna talk to her, she’s hot as hell)

He ate my heart
He ate my heart
Instead he’s a monster in my bed

I wanna Just Dance
But he took me home instead
Uh oh! There was a monster in my bed
We French kissed on a subway train
He tore my clothes right off

He ate my heart then he ate my brain
Uh uh oh
(I love that girl)
(Wanna talk to her, she’s hot as hell

That boy is a monster
M-m-m-monster
(Could I love him?)

That boy is a monster
M-m-m-monster
(Could I love him?)
That boy is a monster
M-m-m-monster
(Could I love him?)

That boy is a monster
Er-er-er-er

“Monster” by Lady Ga Ga - This is the song that inspired the story!
It was a cool crisp night in the midst of December. The sky was a deep navy between patches of ashen snow clouds, illuminated by the flakes that fell and gathered on the ground. The sidewalks were lined with puddles of slush and snow that slopped with each step Levy took with her tiny red boots. She was the only sign of life in the deserted streets, her form minuscule as she made her way between skyscrapers and parking garages.

The small girl was bundled up in a green coat, with a fluffy gray knitted scarf that concealed part of her delicate chin. Her arms were snuggly wrapped around several schoolbooks that she hadn’t been able to fit in the bag draped over her shoulder. Her wild hair was bandana free for a change, but still held up in its usual manner by the headband of a pair of earmuffs. They seemed to do a fine job at keeping the girl’s messy blue strands back and out of her face, but not of protecting her hair from the elements as it grew damp from the snow. Her short legs were the only other part of her that wasn’t bundled, as all they dawned were a pair of black, tight fitting stockings.

She was walking slowly through the city in an effort to get back to her dorm building, after a long night of studying at her favorite twenty-four-hour coffee shop. She took her time, enjoying the quiet atmosphere that was winter, despite what a crazy time of year it was.

The holidays were approaching and so normally the town was a bustle, what with all the crazy shoppers and holiday cheer. As if that wasn’t enough, it was also finals time at the University. Students were normally running all over the place, driven by caffeine and ambition. Magnolia was truly chaotic this time of year, but right now? Right now, it was about two in the morning and the city was so quiet, it was almost as if you could hear the snowflakes landing.

Levy closed her eyes for a moment and began to hum to herself lightly, as she walked all alone in the midst of night. She couldn’t help, but smile blissfully, her mind taking advantage of the calm, after several hours of disciplined straining and studying. This break was very much needed. She was quite tired and ready to get to bed once she got home, but she wasn’t about to let the peaceful moment pass her by without enjoying it.
She took a soft breath of the cold air once her humming died down, allowing herself to really feel everything. She could feel the sting in her nose and cheeks, probably red from the cold. She could feel the icy water beginning to seep through her boots thus wetting her socks, but she didn’t care. Her hair was starting to become damp, as the snowflakes continued to pile on each strand, but it didn’t stop the sweet rhythm of beautiful music that was playing inside of her head.

Impulse seemed to take over as Levy suddenly stopped walking and opened her eyes. She immediately looked to the sky, one hand going out, as if to try and catch the falling flakes, while the other held onto the books she had been carrying. She could see the tops of high towers outlined against gray clouds, along with all of the white specks that came floating carelessly towards her. They were landing on her face, heavying her eyelashes with their water weight.

The city was beautiful to her this time of year and it made her appreciate how much she truly enjoyed living in Magnolia. Despite all of the stresses that came with living in the big city, she was happy she had made the choice to go to Makarov’s University. She was working towards being a med student, working towards her dream and for the first time in a long time, she felt like she had finally found a place to call home again.

These hopeful and happy thoughts took hold of Levy so strongly that she began twirling around, what with nobody there to see, before continuing her walk cheerfully. Her smile lighting up her face in a secretive way, knowing that this moment was for her and her alone. Her large hazel eyes looked back towards the sidewalk before her as she continued her walk almost absent-mindedly. She was still lost in her thoughts, when she heard the sound of sirens.

Levy glanced up, her head looking around as the sirens became significantly louder. She could hear them coming towards her, she turned around just as the sound became deafening and there it was. A fire truck came swinging around the corner of the street she had been walking along, at full speed, despite the snowy roads. She paused to watch as the emergency vehicle blew past her, causing her eyebrows to shoot upwards. She stood there watching, mouth agape until it disappeared around another corner, to the next street over. She could still hear the sirens; it hadn’t gone very far from the sounds of it. She listened for a minute longer as she also realized it was headed in the direction she was going, towards her dorm. That was when she also noticed she could hear even more sirens in the distance.

Levy stood there, one eyebrow up and her head tilted, as her brain continued to muse over these findings, that was until another odd sensation hit her. A strange smell... Levy’s eyes went wide as she looked back up towards the sky. This time noticing a dark ominous black cloud among all of the gray ones.

It’s a fire! A huge one! Her thoughts screamed, as she wasted no more time, taking off in a full out sprint down the street. Her eyes began to tear up and stream across her face, as the cold wind dived into them with each step. Her lungs began to hurt as the icy air came crashing into her insides each time she panted.

Please don’t be my building! Was all she could think, her worst fears beginning to take form, causing her to panic. It’s all I have; it’s everything! She had no way of knowing where exactly the smoke was billowing from, but she could tell it was nearby, as was her building. She ran around the corner after what felt like an eternity, setting herself up for a perfect view of the devastation.

It was a large square building, bursting in bright dancing oranges and yellows, but almost overshadowed by a heavy fog of black ash. It was an apartment building, but not one Levy knew of anybody living in. In fact, as far as she knew, it was one of the abandoned buildings due for renovations by Makarov.
Levy stood there frozen for a moment, as the bright colors continued to bounce off of her skin, reflecting in her large amazed eyes. Her sights were going from the top of the building, that was bursting with fire, down towards the base where fire trucks, ambulances and police cars were parked, lights shining. She could see many long streams of white, jetting up towards the blaze. The firefighters were doing their best to fight off the flames, but right now it looked as if it were a lost cause, even despite the snow.

Fire was shooting out and sparking from most every window of the structure, leaving it to already look torn and tattered. It appeared to be on the brink of collapse as the fire continued to eat it away. Levy could barely hear the firefighter’s shouts to one another, over the loud buzz of the flames. She stood there mesmerized, by both her fear and the beauty of the overwhelming destruction as the fire proudly roared at her, as if it were a beast come to life, contently enjoying its meal. It was terrifying and she wanted nothing more than to run, but it was as if her feet were planted. That was until she felt her eyes beginning to sting.

She was far too close and she was beginning to breathe in the smoke and ash. This realization finally seemed to stir some sense into the girl as she immediately began to cough what she could out. She brought a gloved hand over her nose and mouth, while the other still clung to her books.

“I gotta get out of here… I have to get home.” She choked out, as she ducked her head in an attempt to avoid the smoke further. Normally this was the street she would walk down to get home, but she didn’t want to get any closer to the fire than she already was. She began to glance around, her eyes squinting in pain; the smoke had grown much heavier within the short time she had been standing there. It was hard for her to see where to escape to, what with it burning her eyes and the black fog concealing everything. That was when she noticed an alleyway a couple of buildings away and she quickly made her way towards it.

Once she got between the tight walls, she could feel the clean air returning to her lungs, making it a bit easier to breathe. The alleyway was positioned in just the right direction away from the burning building, successfully shielding her from its fumes. She came upon it, letting her small body fall against the brick wall of one of the buildings as she gasped for more air. Letting her books collapse into the snow, before coughing a couple more times, to rid herself of the smoke. She leaned her head back, her arms down at her sides. Now that she could breathe again her mind was going a mile a minute. She was staring at her feet, trying to gather her bearings so that she could figure out what to do, when she suddenly heard an odd noise. It sounded like a person moaning.

Levy’s eyes widened as she pushed herself off of the wall. *Now what could it be?* Her mind questioned with disbelief, after just having to witness the heinous fire. She stood in a ready stance; staring down the dark alleyway boldly, ready to run at a moment’s notice.

“Who’s there?!” She questioned demandingly, trying to sound brave. Her question was greeted with another moan and that was when she was able to spot it. The place where the odd noises were coming from, the issue was, it was hard to tell what exactly it was. It was dark and although it sounded human, from where she stood it didn’t look it.

“Is someone there?!” Levy hollered out, knowing someone was. She was both worried and confused by what she saw.

“Please…” A dry voice begged back. “Please help me!” The voice hollered weakly, finally making successful words. Levy’s eyes grew large, as she realized that the person was in a heap on the ground. This discovery and the desperate plea for help, urged her forward without hesitation. She sprinted up towards what she could now clearly see, was the beaten body of a man.

He had short navy hair and a very pointed face, with a strange black ‘X’ tattoo on his forehead, just
above his right eyebrow. It was hard to tell much else about him, seeing as he had been beaten to a bloody pulp. He was sitting on the ground, one leg stretched out and the other folded in, his back against the wall, along with his head and neck. His skin was covered in what Levy imagined to be ash from the fire, but among the ash, were multiple cuts and bruises, along with a few burns. He had a black eye and his face was swollen in places. His mouth was a bloody mess, with missing teeth. His clothes were torn and scorched, and he basically looked like he had done battle with a dragon.

Levy’s wide eyes were searching him for any obvious signs of life threatening injuries. She couldn’t see anything immediate, but that didn’t mean he was out of danger. She threw her body down before him, on her knees, cautiously reaching towards him.

“We need to get you to the hospital!” She exclaimed taking off her scarf, but the man was just shaking his head, weakly moaning as she reached for his forearm where there was a very particular nasty looking wound, that was bleeding heavily.

“Noooo… No….” He moaned between bloody teeth. Levy wasn’t really paying attention as her hands took hold of his severely injured arm gently, cautiously wrapping her scarf around the wound. The fabric was soaking red immediately upon contact, forever ruining it, as she wrapped it tightly around his arm. It didn’t matter to her, she just wanted to slow down the bleeding at all cost.

“Yes, yes we do.” She responded sternly as she finished what she was doing, then began to move her body in such a way, so that she could try and help the man move. “Come on. There’s an ambulance around the corner. I can get you there. I know you’re in pain, but we can do it.” She stated back, trying to stay level headed, as he didn’t budge, even with her urging.

“No, you don’t understand…” The man moaned. “I just need to hide or get out of here before he finds me.” The beaten man choked out in a scratchy voice. At this, Levy’s thin eyebrows pushed together with deeper concern. Her head then lowered back to his level. She looked into his dark eyes perplexed.

“Before who finds you?”

It was just as the words left her mouth, that the beaten man’s eyes went wide with terror, staring at something above Levy’s head and that was when Levy knew. She could suddenly feel his presence behind her, like a brick wall that had always been there. Her head went up, her eye transfixing to the wall just above the beaten man’s head; there was a large dark shadow. She could feel all of the air leaving her lungs in a soft gasp, as she felt a breath blow against the back of her now bare neck.

“Hey shrimp.” Oh, that voice, so quiet and yet it resounded in her ear even through her earmuffs. It was so calm and yet full of malice, as if the one who wielded it, held all of the power to rip her to shreds and was just teasing her with the mere idea of it. It was rough and gritty sounding, like one you’d expect to hear from a man who did time, but strong like it was by his choice. Levy felt her heart ice over and drop into the pit of her stomach, before bouncing back up to pound rapidly in her chest.

“Black Steel Gajeel…” The man’s voice was whining as tears began to stream down his face, with a whimper.

Levy slowly began to turn her head shakily, her wide eyes meeting deep red crimson ones, with black slit-like pupils. Even in her wildest nightmares Levy hadn’t ever expected to meet eyes quite that monstrous. They were almost animal like, glowing back at her in a cold, hardened stare, framed by a chiseled bare brow. Yes, bare, as in he had no eyebrows! Well at least not hair. In their place, instead were stud piercings. Three silver ones above each one of his eyes. His face was so close to
hers, it was hard for her to make out much else about him, other than she knew he was scowling, but that didn’t matter. She could already feel her mouth drying and her mind going blank and dizzy with panic as he stared right back at her.

She watched him, quivering, her mouth agape as his eyes slowly slid off of her and finally onto the man in front of her.

“That’s right.” Came that same voice, dripping with darkness as Black Steel Gajeel raised his body up to its full height. Levy’s eyes refused to leave his face, out of pure fear of what he might do to her, should she even blink. She watched him rise and tower over her small frame, like a beast. Then finally her eyes began pouring over every detail of him cautiously. From his long crazy black mane, that came spiking out of his scalp, to the silver studs that lined certain features of his face. Three on each side of his sharp nose, two on his pointed chin, just below his thin devious lips, and five lining each one of his ears. The whole image of his face made complete by two very prominent cheekbones.

Levy had always known she was small, but never in her whole life had she ever felt this small, while kneeling in the very presence of this scary man, as her sights bravely fell over the rest of his being. First landing on his long-arched neck nestled with an Adam’s apple, then to the sharp collarbones that protruded through his shirt, leading into his wide set chest. She could see the lines of his pectorals vaguely outlined; she didn’t need to see them clearly, to know that he was toned. The rest of him kind of gave it away, as her eyes continued to timidly explore his form going towards his arms. In the dead of winter, he wore no coat, allowing her to see every corded muscle that spiraled through them, until she noticed a large black symbol tattooed on his right shoulder. She paused taking the symbol in. It looked to be some kind of insignia and she couldn’t help, but notice how it was somehow familiar to her, as if she had seen it before.

The next thing she spotted were several jagged scars, that wrapped around the tattooed arm as if some large monster’s claws or teeth had torn at his skin, ages ago. That, followed by more metal studs, protruding from his sand colored skin on both forearms, making a line down towards his gloved hands, where she could see a pair of brass knuckles. She could feel herself automatically swallowing past the lump in her throat, before her eyes continued their way down. Finally reaching his stomach and belted waistline that were swayed towards her, as he stood over her in an almost proud stance. She could only imagine the finely shaped muscles that lay hidden underneath. His lengthily legs stood firmly, dawned in beige baggy pants, that were tucked into two bolted black boots, that looked almost as big as her head.

Once Levy’s eyes had finished their long scale down, they immediately bounced back up to his face, where she was met by the most menacing, toothy grin she had ever seen. His canines were abnormally large, making them resemble fangs. He held her stare for a moment, his grin only widening, taking up his whole span of his face. Which made him look like he might laugh at her.

“Gi hi!” Came the sound and what an odd sound it was too. Levy didn’t even realize that he was laughing at her at first. “Ya like what you see, little girl?” He questioned smugly, with one eye wider than the other. Making him look almost deranged with that crazy smile and his long tongue hanging out. Levy just sat there staring at him completely frozen and her mouth hanging open with no sound. The only noise was the beaten man’s whimpers. She couldn’t seem to move or speak; she didn’t even feel like she was breathing at this point, she was so scared.

Gajeel let out the odd laughter once again at her silence, his nose was wrinkling for a second, before he finally closed his mouth. Her reaction greatly amusing him, before he calmed back down. His face was growing less crazy, as his grin eased to a smaller smile, with teeth still bared. He slowly began to lean back towards her now, making Levy automatically move back as his face got close to hers.
“Now.” He stated, his face only mere inches from hers, still smiling evilly. “Onto business.” He said it quietly, almost whispering it, making Levy’s heart thud loudly in her ears. She began to fear the worst as she saw him cracking the knuckle that wasn’t holding his weapon. All she could wonder was, what is he going to do to me and how am I possibly going to stop it? What she didn’t expect, was for him to suddenly back away from her and stand up straight, fold his arms and say. “You seem to have taken an interest in my target there.”

Levy looked at him for a moment, her eyebrows pushing together before one rose up at him. Now he was just watching her with a blank stare, his red eyes slowly moving to the man just behind her, as if to emphasize whom he was referring to. Levy caught the hint and glanced at the crying man from over her shoulder quickly. Her hair swaying with the movement of her head, before she looked back at Gajeel, who waiting for her expectantly. He was no longer grinning at her and he looked a lot less scary than he had a few seconds earlier, but she was still intimidated, as he shot her a hard stare, waiting for her response.

“Your target…?” She suddenly heard her own shaky voice, utter out questioningly as she glanced back at the poor man, who was shaking his head and watching her with pleading eyes.

“So, you can speak then?” She heard Gajeel say arrogantly in response, causing her head to snap back up in his direction. He was smirking at her now and something about it irked her, but at least it wasn’t as terrifying as that grin of his. Levy watched him with her doe-like eyes, her brow mangled in concern. Gajeel took a step forward, his smirk disappearing and being replaced with a scowl, as he pointed at the crying man on the ground. “This man. This man is mine.” He stated flatly.

Levy looked at the beaten man Gajeel was pointing at once again. He was now sobbing; his upper body having fallen more on the ground as he cowered.

The tone in Gajeel’s voice should have been enough. It should have been enough for Levy to get up and walk away with no questions asked. It would have been so much easier, if Levy had just accepted what Gajeel had told her that day… And she knew this, even at the very moment it was happening, but something inside of her was protesting against it. Her inner nature just couldn’t let it be, not even to save her own skin. Not when she knew what was most likely going to happen.

“Are you going to kill him?” She suddenly asked, all fear replaced with concern as she looked back up towards Gajeel.

Gajeel paused at her question, taking in her serious features with a raised studded brow. He couldn’t believe that this tiny shrimp had, had the nerve to ask him such a question. Especially when he could easily see, how terrified of him she was.

“That’s not something you need be concernin yer self with shrimp.” He responded firmly. “You jus need to listen to me, when I tell you he’s mine and go on yer marry way, like you din’t see a thing.” He added calmly as Levy slowly began to stand now on her quivering legs. Gajeel watched her, his eyes trailing down her thick thighs, over her soaked black stockings, all the way down to her tiny feet, until she was looking back up at him.

“I can’t do that.” She stated boldly. “Not when I know what you’re going to do.” Gajeel’s eyes narrowed on the girl as she stood there with two tight stubborn fists pinned to her sides. She really was small, like ridiculously small and petite. He could really see that, now that she was standing. Hell, she only barely, just met the middle of his chest in height. Her large round eyes were boring into him with a strong and determined look as she held her ground, despite her obvious fear. Her thin eyebrows were crossed, and the golden color of her bright eyes were burning into him, making him
feel angry over the righteousness of her expression.

“Well yer gonna have to!” Gajeel replied, his voice rising as he stepped closer to the girl, in an attempt to intimidate her back down.

Levy could feel her heart pounding in her throat, but she didn’t budge, instead she just bit down and looked at him as fiercely as she could.

“I won’t let you hurt him anymore!” She shouted as Gajeel gave her a dark glowering look. His body was now planted right in front of hers. His broad chest right in her face, as he stared down at her like the devil.

“And how do you plan on stoppin’ me?” Came his voice like ice, so dark and seething with anger, that Levy felt chills run down her spine. She couldn’t tell if he was threatening her or not, but she knew she couldn’t back down. She couldn’t let him kill this man; she would never forgive herself if she did. But he was right; there was no way she could even hope to stop him. He could easily overpower her, there had to be something else she could do, her mind was racing.

“I’ll tell the police!” She shouted. “They’re right around the corner! You won’t be able to get away!” It was this threat that pushed Gajeel over the edge as he suddenly reached out, snatching her tiny arm and jerking her body up and into him. Pulling her face closer to his, in such a fast motion that she didn’t even have time to gasp.

“Yer not goin’ ta do any of that!” He growled, his nose practically touching hers as his red eyes gleamed. “Cause I ain’t leavin without im, even if that means I have to take you with me!” He added, his voice barking back. She could feel his warm breath as he spoke these words right in her face. She could also feel the tight grip on her arm. He wasn’t hurting her, even as she struggled some in his grasp, but she could feel the hidden force behind it, as if he was just teasing her with what he could do to her without even really trying.

Gajeel could smell a wintery scent coming from her as he held her there, staring at her. He couldn’t seem to stop himself from noticing the smooth milky white texture, of her skin and the way her damp blue hair framed her face. He could feel his own heart pace quicken, as he felt her tiny arm trying to twist free. Her wrists were so small that he felt like his large hands could wrap around them twice over. He could feel heat moving to his neck, as he stared into her large doe like eyes. His sights traveling down to her cute button nose and then to the thickness of her bottom lip.

Then just as suddenly as he grabbed her, he let her go. With a small propelling push of his hand, as if he couldn’t bear to be that close to her for another second longer. His head immediately turned away from her and his body took a slight step back.

Levy caught herself; he hadn’t pushed her too hard, but enough to get his point across. She stood there, her arms curling into herself and her cheeks going pink as relief filled her. Thankful that he hadn’t hurt her, but her eyes went down in shame, as she didn’t know what else she could do now, because there was no way she would ever be able to stop him.

There was a long moment of silence as Gajeel stared at the brick wall over his shoulder in confusion. Not understanding what had gotten into him, rage was boiling over from within his stomach. Then there was Levy staring at her feet, completely forlorn and at a loss for what she could do.

The snowflakes were falling over them, as the smoke billowed past the alleyway. The burning smell was still clinging to the air, but the noise of sirens had died. Levy was slowly realizing that this was the same silence that she had felt earlier on her walk home, before all of this had happened. The very same peaceful atmosphere that was winter. Levy was playing with her fingers when she finally
decided to speak.

“Gajeel…? That… is your name, right?” Gajeel stood there, a small smile washing over his lips, but he didn’t move.

“Yea… You got it.” He answered calmly, the anger in his tone all, but gone.

“Did you… Did you start that fire?” Levy questioned cautiously. At this she heard him laugh, his unusual laugh once again.

“Nah.” He stated. “Friends of mine.” He answered, as he looked back over his shoulder at her now, making her look back up at him as well. “Tryin’ to stop me. Jus like you.” He said. Levy heard his voice and then her eyes slowly looked over him again, this time noticing some slight singes in his clothing. Maybe that was why he wasn’t wearing a coat in such weather, he had probably needed to take it off or something if it had caught on fire.

This thought made her suddenly shiver, as she was just remembering how cold she actually was. Her body was basically soaked now. She hadn’t noticed it before, what with all of the adrenaline running through her. Gajeel was watching as her tiny body began to shiver, her eyes were going downcast.

“You cold shrimp?” He asked with a smirk. “You should probably run along and get home.” He added.

“Please just tell me.” She begged, “Why are you after this man?” Gajeel looked down at the man who was still crying very quietly now.

“He stole from my boss.” He stated. “His name is Bora and he is a bad person… Not to mention I owed him this beatin’ fer a friend of mine.” He stated, now glancing up at Levy with a scowl. “Someone like you, shouldn’t be worrin’ bout what happens to scum like him.”

“And you?” Levy asked.

“I’m no better, but that’s why I’m gonna be the one to handle a guy like him.” Gajeel answered as he turned away from her, stepping up to the fallen man. Bora started to cower as Gajeel approached. His arms flying over his head as if that would somehow cover him. He was starting to sob and whimper loudly again. Gajeel stood there, his hard stare stabbing at Bora’s back in disgust, as Levy watched him.

“Please don’t kill him.” She tried one last time. Gajeel just bent over, grabbing the back of the man’s shirt and then he slowly started to pull him up.

“NO NO! PLEASE!” Bora began to beg and cry.

“These are my orders. Shut up!” Gajeel snapped at Bora, as he slowly brought the man over his shoulder. Then he turned towards Levy again, addressing her once more. “As I told you, nothin’ fer you to be concernin’ yer self with.” He stated firmly.

“Gajeel…” Levy started to say, but she was interrupted by his shouts.

“LEAVE!” His red eyes were blazing back into hers with a newfound rage as she disobeyed. She watched him, her feet planted and her eyes sad as if she might cry. “Get outta here! Unless you wanna see what, I do to him!” He roared at her, making her eyes go wide with terror and that was when Levy’s feet finally started to step back, away from him. She could feel the tears starting to well up in her eyes, as a sick feeling washed over her.
“Get the hell outta here! NOW! JUST FORGET EVERYTHING YOU’VE SEEN!” Gajeel raged at her with a booming voice and an arm going out, pointing in a direction and then that was it.

Levy finally turned around and began to sprint away, as fast as she could, to the other end of the alleyway. There she made it out onto the next street over, pausing to take a breath, but Gajeel was still shouting at her, urging her to keep running away further. She wasted no more time before doing what she was told. Not being able to bear the sight of what was coming. She slammed her eyes shut and ran with all of her might through the snow. Tears began to spill down her face, as she made a straight line towards her dorm.

Levy could feel herself becoming so upset as she made that sprint home. It was so hard to keep it in, but she needed to get home as soon as possible and once she finally did. She slammed the door shut behind her, collapsing onto the floor of her dorm, soaked and crying, luckily her roommate was sound asleep. She threw off her soaked coat, boots and stockings onto the floor, by a heat vent, before leaning her body back against the door. She could feel her earmuffs getting in the way and so she then ripped them off as well. Finally allowing her messy blue strands to fall over her face, the snowflakes that clung to each one, melting upon contact with her hot skin which caused the wet hair stick to her. Her cheeks were inflamed red from the cold, the running and her tears; her eyes were swollen and puffy. She stood up slowly, her body wobbling. Her clothes were still damp and she was still so cold as she panted. Each breath was stinging her from the inside out, from all of the icy air that had raked through her, during the run home.

She made her way to the bathroom to draw a bath, because she knew she wouldn’t be able to sleep just yet. She slowly removed her damp clothing as she watched the rushing water pour out of the facet, with a relaxing sound. She couldn’t help, but watch it as steam began to lift up from the stream. Her tears were drying as she became entranced by it.

She dipped her red, icy feet in slowly, feeling the burn as the water began to fill the tub. Slowly her cold body adjusted to the warm water, slowly sinking into it as it filled the tub. Soon she was in, up to just below her nose, her eyes closing gently as she listened to the soft noise of the rushing water. She could feel how exhausted she was as the warmth of the bath filled her. Physically, from the cold and all of the running she had just done. Mentally, from all of the studying and stress she had just been dealing with and now emotionally, because of everything she had just witnessed. You were supposed to forget it all, remember? Her thoughts reminded her. That’s what he told you to do.

Levy opened her eyes at this and all she could think was, how?

*How am I supposed to do that Gejeel?*

*I couldn’t forget it; I couldn’t forget what I saw that night and I couldn’t forget meeting you Gajeel. Even as much as I wanted to.*

“I couldn’t…” She whispered.

“What was that?” Gajeel asked still hovering over Levy’s back. Levy opened her eyes, the sound of booming music returning to her. She could see the wooden floor of the club once again and Gajeel’s shadow still hanging over her. She was out of her memory and back in the present and here he was, hovering over her, just like that night.

Levy turned to face him, her large eyes matching his red ones with a hard stare as if she was annoyed by his presence. His grin widened and she could see those long canines of his, protruding like they
always did. The metal piercings on his face were occasionally shining as the moving lights bounced off of them. Levy felt like she was having déjà vu, as he looked the very same as he did, the night they had met.

“Now that’s quite the look shrimp. Are ya not happy ta see me?” He asked her in that deep arrogant voice of his.

“Gajeel.” She stated his name seriously, getting his wide mouth to finally close, but now he was just smirking at her instead. “What are you doing here?” She questioned him firmly, but with little, to no emotion. He let loose one of his unique laughs, before answering her as if amused by her displeased tone.

“Definitely not.” He answered his own question, completely ignoring hers. Then his red eyes slowly trailed from her face, down the length of her body with no shame, making her cheeks instantly flush pink. She was wearing a form fitting tank top dress, with a belt and a short skirt. Over that she had on a small short sleeve jacket and tall stockings over her legs.

Her hands went up to the rim of her jacket instinctively. Clinging to the fabric tightly and pulling it closed, as if she was suddenly aware of how much skin was exposed over her chest. She stood there awkwardly, as his eyes continued to drag their way down, over the curve of her waistline and then to her legs.

“Why am I here?” He questioned, still not hiding the fact that he was looking at all of her. “What are you doing here?” He asked, finally bringing his eyes back up to meet hers. Levy’s brow lowered, as she shot him a disgusted look, her annoyance clearly showing.

“I asked you first!” She snapped and it was this response that finally made him rip his eyes off of her. His head shifted up and swiveled around as he took in the room with a shrug of his shoulders.

“Alright shrimp, if ya must know, work.” He answered nonchalantly.

“Work.” She repeated in a flat skeptical tone.

“You think I hang out at places like this?” He asked her, his red eyes meeting her face again. Levy glanced down, what he was saying, actually did make a lot of sense. Gajeel didn’t strike her as the clubbing type, but it also worried her, seeing as she had a basic idea of what Gajeel’s ‘work’ consisted of.

“What is Jose having you do?” She questioned bravely. Her eyes going back up, earning a snicker from him.

“You think I’d tell ya that shrimp?” He answered, now dawning his signature grin. “Hell no, but don’t ya worry, because my business here is through anyways.” He stated, making Levy breathe out in a sigh of relief. If he had already done whatever it was he was supposed to do, then that had to mean he would be leaving without causing any trouble or at least any noticeable trouble.

“Then what are you still doing here?” She asked earning a smug smirk from him as he bent down, moving his face towards hers.

“I saw you here.” He answered smoothly, making the heat in Levy’s cheeks turn up, as she bit down nervously. His eyes were quickly skimming down her neck again, but they moved back up before he continued. “But obviously, you want me gone, why’s that?”

“W-why? Like you don’t know?!” Levy uttered out in disbelief.
“Enlighten me.” He stated and it was at this point, she pushed his shoulder back with her tiny hand, in an attempt to get him to back away from her. Really all she did, was succeed in pushing herself back as his body stayed planted, like the wall of muscle he was.

“Because I can’t stand you Gajeel!” She answered back angrily. Gajeel rose up and laughed again at the response. Levy was dropping her arms at her sides in frustration with him. He was so arrogant and she hated that about him.

“So that’s it eh?” He responded, once his laughter had ceased. Levy was glaring at him as her teeth clamped down, trying to control the wild anger that only he seemed to stir within her.

“Of course! Haven’t I made that clear! Just leave me alone!” She snapped, but Gajeel just revealed his teeth once again.

“I get it now.” He stated, making Levy look at him as if he were slow.

“Well it’s about freaking time! It’s a wonder that it took you this long to get it through that thick head of yours!” She exclaimed, just as Gajeel took a step closer, this action giving her pause and making her become uneasy as he towered over her. “Wait… W-What are you doing?” She choked out, her heart was beginning to pound.

“I know why yer here now, dressed like that.” He replied arrogantly.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Levy questioned back, her voice low and apprehensive. “Maybe I come here all of the time! How would you know?!?” She added getting louder.

“Ya don’t.” Gajeel stated simply, earning a hostile look from the girl. “I know what you’re like Levy, or did you forget? You don’t come to this side of town and ya sure as hell don’t come to places like this, so ya must be desperate.” Gajeel finished, watching her with an evil gleam in his red eyes, his teeth bared. He got close to her once more, making her chest constrict into tight knots. “What’s a matter? Hit too close ta home? Is that why ya want me gone? Am I ruinin’ yer plans for the night?”

Levy’s frustrations with Gajeel were through the roof, after having to listen to the rash barrage of theories he was spinning about her. He was far too presumptuous, but she swallowed it all up, until the very last comment when she just couldn’t bare it anymore. His persistence finally succeeding in unhinging her rage, as her arm came swinging up to meet his face, but her swiftness was no match for his. In one fluid motion, he caught her wrist, making her stare up at him with wide eyes, as he held her hand in place.

What were you thinking?! Did you forget how dangerous this man is Levy?! Her thoughts were now scolding her, as her whole body began to quiver under his grasp. Any struggling she did was all in vain, as panic began to set in. He had her now and he showed no signs of letting her go. All she could do was watch as his eyes moved from hers, to the wrist he was holding up by his face.

“What’s this?” He questioned calmly. His grip tightening just ever so slightly, making one of Levy’s eyes wince, more out of fear than pain. She closed them; her head looking down and away as she braced herself for whatever was coming next. She couldn’t speak. It was as if her throat had closed up. She could feel her knees going weak. Fear had completely taken over, making her helpless as he held her there so effortlessly. Her complexion was beginning to turn pale, making his effects on her completely visible. She probably would have collapsed, if it weren’t for him holding her up. He glanced back at her; his grin was gone now and replaced with a scowl.

“You were gonna slap me, right?” He questioned, forcing Levy to open her eyes. Her heartbeat was
resounding in her ears. ‘Because ya can’t stand me? No, that’s not what I think.’ He said coolly, his voice quiet. ‘I think…’ He started to say, as he turned his sights back on her captured wrist. ‘That you can’t stand… That you want me…’ He finished with a voice deep, before closing his eyes slowly and then placing his lips on Levy’s wrist.

Levy watched him, her face going from pale to a hot red, almost instantaneously. The rapid change in body temperature brought on by his bold action, successfully making her dizzy. She could feel the coolness of sweat on the back of her neck as his warm lips gently pressed against her skin. She was a prisoner of shock as she watched him, completely exasperated and unable to think.

**Do something Levy!** Her mind shouted and that was when she began to squirm under his grip, with more force than ever and just as his lips disappeared so did his hold on her. Her form suddenly jetted back a few steps away from him, pulling her now free arm back towards her body protectively. She stared up at him, with her large innocent eyes as if he had just violated her and for once he wasn’t smirking at her smugly. Instead he was just watching her with a hard stare, almost as if he had been completely serious.

But he couldn’t be, could he? He was just teasing her again, like he had the last time she saw him. It was what he did; he was full of himself and he seemed to have this notion that every woman wanted him.

“What are you doing?!” She questioned him demandingly.

“Whatever I want.” He answered simply. No arrogance, no smirks or grins in his voice this time. “You should try it sometime.”

“I don’t want you, Gajeel.” She answered defiantly.

“Of course you don’t.” He answered back sarcastically, his form coming towards her again.

“Don’t touch me.” She started to say as she moved away again.

“Then just run away from me.” He responded, speaking over her. “I won’t chase you. I think you know that.” He said, moving close to her again, his hand now reaching towards her face as Levy backed up, against a table. She stood there watching him, her face red with heat as his hand hung there between them.

“I-I can’t. I told Lucy I’d stay here and wait for her.”

“Excuses.” Gajeel spoke as his fingers slowly went against her cheek, feeling her warmth. She stood there, still against his touch as his thumb went around and under to the other side of her face, successfully cupping her chin with his large hand. She was amazed by how softly he was touching her with his rough hand, as he gently pushed her head up to look at him. “You could have stopped me or gotten away from me at any point now. You could have screamed, yelled, called fer help… What with all these people here… If you really thought, you were in danger. And yer too smart to forget that, so then why din’t you?” He asked her knowingly, his stare blazing into hers.

“I…” She uttered as Gajeel’s head neared hers. It looked as if he was leaning in to kiss her and Levy just stood there frozen, letting him do as he pleased. Completely entranced and at a loss for everything, it was like she couldn’t even think coherent thoughts.

“You what?” He spoke as his head came so close, that the tip of his nose was grazing hers.

“I don’t want any trouble…” She finally breathed out. Her stomach was flipping as she watched him close his eyes and then he rested his forehead against hers. His lips were just a touch away, when she
found her voice again. “I want you to leave.”

He paused there for a second, his warm breath against her face. The pressure of his forehead leaning against hers. His hand still resting on her cheek, his thumb swaying over the skin, feeling her softly, but he didn’t move any closer. He didn’t close the distance with his lips. Instead he just hung over them for a second longer, before slowly moving his head back and away, his hand still holding her chin.

She watched his eyes open as his warmth disappeared and he gave her the stare of a starved animal, so full of disappointment. Slowly his hand slid off of her face and the look of desperation faded from his features and was replaced with a weak smirk.

“Fine have it yer way, shrimp.” He spoke almost in a sigh, his voice easy and light. It was the last thing she had expected from him. She had expected more protest, or anger, maybe even force, but she got none of that.

“That’s it?” Gajeel’s hands move to his sides in confusion.

“What were you expectin’?” He questioned as Levy finally eased her body off of the table she had been backed up against.

“I-” She began to say, but Gajeel quickly cut her off.

“Never mind, jus forget it.” He said it awkwardly, almost as if he didn’t want to know, then he looked back towards her. “Look I’ll leave ya alone, but I ain’t leavin, not just yet.” He stated, changing the subject and this made Levy raise an eyebrow at him skeptically. The mood between them was easing back to normal.

“Why?” She asked him flatly and this made that grin of his flare up once again.

“You really need ta learn to stop askin’ me so many questions little girl. Yer never gonna get any answers.”

“Fine!” She snapped. “Whatever! I don’t care anymore! Please just go away and leave me alone, before my friends comes back!” At this Gajeel let out another one of his odd little laughs, his eyes closing in amusement. It was so unusual to see him make a face like that. A genuine looking smile, where he didn’t look deranged for once.

“Yer so easily worked up.” He replied. “I like it.” He added gleefully.

“Go!” Levy shouted as she pointed elsewhere, making him finally start to turn away from her.

“Don’t worry, I’m leavin’.” He said calmly as he began to take a few steps away, but his head turned back, so that one eye could look at her, from over his shoulder. “But just remember I’ll be here, if ya change yer mind.” He added slyly, making Levy just bite down angrily as his head moved back forwards once again.

Then he slowly walked away disappearing behind the bodies of people without so much as another word. Finally leaving Levy alone with all of her frustrations over his surprise appearance.

Chapter End Notes
Home, is where I want to be
But I guess I’m already there
I come home (h-h-home), she lifted up her wings
I guess that this must be the place

Home, is where I want to be
Pick me up and turn me round
I feel numb, born with a weak heart
I guess I must be having fun

The less we say about it the better
Make it up as we go along
Feet on the ground, head in the sky
It’s okay, I know nothing’s wrong, nothing

Hiyo, I’ve got plenty of time
Hiyo, you’ve got light in your eyes
And You’re standing here beside me
I love the passing of time
Never for money, always for love
Cover up and say goodnight, say goodnight

Home is where I want to be
But I guess I’m already there
I come home, she lifted up her wings
I guess that this must be the place

I can’t tell one from another
Did I find you, or you find me?
There was a time before we were born
If someone asks, this is where I’ll be, where I’ll be’

Hiyo, we drift in and out
Hiyo, sing into my mouth
Out of all those kinds of people
You’ve got a face with a view
I’m just an animal looking for a home
Share the same space for a minute of two

And you’ll love me ’til my heart stops
Love me ’til I’m dead
Eyes that light up, eyes that look through
Cover up the blank spots, hit me on the head

“This Must Be The Place” By Miles Fisher
Chapter Summary

Gajeel has a small confrontation that may come back to bite him later. Levy and Lucy try to put a positive spin on their night only to be ruined by prying eyes. Levy finally caves and mentions some of her past dealings with Gajeel.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Monster

Chapter 3 Eyes

Gajeel stalked off towards the bar, his grin slowly fading into an unfriendly scowl. His arms were swinging at his sides as he made a path through the crowd with his large body, not minding who he ran into. Most of the patrons were clearing out of his way on their own accord once they spotted his monstrous form stomping towards them. His fists and teeth were clenched tightly out of frustration. His mind was stuck on a loop of the scene he had just walked away from, stirring a horde of unwanted emotions that he would rather not deal with and it was all, because of her.

The only reason Gajeel had even come to such a place was for a briefing with some of Jose’s associates who had insisted on that location. He actually hated clubs, because he didn’t like to dance and if he was going to be drinking, then he’d much rather do it somewhere quiet and less crowded. He had actually been dreading the whole ordeal up until the point he had spotted Levy at the club. Once he knew she was there too, the meeting might as well have fallen on deaf ears as she became about the only thing on his mind.

He couldn’t help it; there was just something alluring about her. She was nothing like any of the women he usually took up with, cut from a completely different cloth. One that was far beyond his grasp and he was well aware of this. The world she belonged to was like a parallel to the one he lived in, with hers being devoid of darkness and his being drenched in it. They were like night and day almost quite literally, with her living day by day in the sunlight and him walking the shadows at night.

Despite this, Gajeel had seen enough of Levy to get an idea of what kind of person she was and it made sense why she wouldn’t want anything to do with him. She actually had a fully functional head on her shoulders for one thing. Normally that wasn’t even something Gajeel would go for in a woman, but with Levy it was part of her draw. The irony being that this same draw also had everything to do with why she would never seemingly want him back, as she was far too smart to get involved with someone like him. This reason was only one among the many, why Levy McGarden piqued Gajeel’s interest.

There weren’t very many people out there that could do that. Gajeel wasn’t really a ‘people’ person
in general. He tolerated them to the degree he needed to and didn’t go out of his way to make friends. This was for the best really, because his work kept him too busy and the consistency of it didn’t really allow for any kind of normal social life, other than the fellow members of Jose’s organization. And even out of that group of people there were really only a select few whom he considered worthy enough to converse with, all of them being on par with his status or higher. This small group was only made up of four others, other than Jose himself and really there was only one among the four, whom he referred to as his friend.

That was about the extent of Gajeel’s social life. He didn’t really find pleasure in spending time with others and overall, he preferred his solitude. Except for when it came to Levy. She was something else entirely and he would often times find himself behaving differently around her. He had met her completely on accident and she had actually gotten in his way, purposely. That alone made her worth remembering, because when he had first laid eyes on her, all he had been able to recognize was her terror.

That word was actually the best description for the look she had given him that night and it was all too familiar to Gajeel. For every time, he saw that expression on someone’s face, he welcomed it, like a son coming home from war. He reveled in the fear he brought out of people. He enjoyed that position of power and intimidation and he would often find people’s fearful reactions to his mere presence greatly amusing, just as he had with Levy.

Her stiff and frightened reaction to seeing him that first night had gone over exactly as he had expected, up until the part where she hadn’t tried to run away. Then to his own amazement, a few minutes later she was actually standing up to him in an attempt to try and protect a man she didn’t even know, but that wasn’t even the part that had shook him the most about her.

The moment that had really struck a chord within Gajeel, was the moment she had asked him not to kill the man, he had already beaten to a bloody mess. The look on her face when she had spoken those words to him, were forever etched into his brain like the scars on his skin. Her expression had been overlaid with such hope, as if she somehow believed, that he was capable of being something better than what he actually was. Her golden eyes searching over his being, for some kind of strain of humanity, as if she somehow knew, that he was just possessed by his actions. A victim of the lifestyle he lived and it was that very look of hers, that made Gajeel finally rekindle the long-forgotten feeling of guilt. A feeling he had been forced to abandon years ago in order to survive and do what needed to be done.

It had both greatly amazed and troubled him at the same time, because it was the last thing he needed in his line of work and she had forced him to deal with it all over again. And now whenever he saw her, he couldn’t help himself. Something would just come over him and he knew that he just couldn’t leave her be, even when she so demanded it.

He couldn’t even blame her for wanting nothing to do with him. No smart, good girl, in their right mind would dare remain in his presence by choice, but at the same time Gajeel couldn’t help, but feel like Levy’s distaste for him was all just a front. Almost as if he could sense a hidden truth in her features whenever she looked his way. There was a girl in there aching for something more.

Maybe it wasn’t exactly ‘him’ she was searching for, but Gajeel wasn’t so sure that Levy was completely beyond that weakness, despite how she portrayed herself. It was the whole reason why he had called her out on it tonight and why he had been so persistent with her. He had just had this slinking feeling that he could work his way in with her, somehow, because deep down he was sure Levy desired for a taste of something dangerous. She had been trying too hard to convince him otherwise, especially tonight.
She just had to want him, just as badly as he wanted her. And oh, did he want her… She had been on his mind way too much since that first night they had met and that was well over three years ago, even after, only seeing her a handful of times within that span. It was that same purity he sensed in her, that also provoked his guilt. Almost like he would risk ruining it, just so he could experience what that was like for once in his sinful life.

She always made him feel that way now. At first, it hadn’t been too much trouble moving on from the guilt once he first felt it, seeing at he didn’t see her for a long time after their first meeting. But soon after the next, he would catch a glimpse of her walking somewhere in town and then sure enough he’d be hearing her voice in the back of his head, while on the job later that same night. Successfully resurfacing the dead feeling he had buried long ago once more. And if she wasn’t haunting him in that way, than she was haunting him in other more, worse ways.

Whenever he would find himself a woman for the night, he couldn’t seem to stop his brain from pondering Levy again. His curiosities piquing in a deep desire to touch that white skin of hers, to be fleshed up against her petite, yet curved form. His thoughts so desperately wanting to fill in the blanks that her clothes covered up, because he just couldn’t seem to stop himself from eyeballing her, each and every time she appeared. She was exactly what he wanted and the fact that he couldn’t have her, just made him suffer all the more. All he could do was stare and tease her, as pay back for how she teased him, each and every time he laid eyes on her without even meaning to. It was driving him through a wall and the only thing he could think to do about it, was drink.

That was exactly what he had planned on doing too, now that he had seen her and gotten so close, only to be rejected. He couldn’t just leave without having a few, it was the only way he would be able to relax and so that was why he was B-lining it for the bar. He was so lost in anger and disappointment, as he marched his way up to it, that he didn’t even notice the large breasted blond girl that had just walked away, until he had arrived at the bar, where someone was blatantly staring at her.

Upon finally reaching the bar, Gajeel immediately spotted two things that displeased him greatly. The first one being the rowdy group of people surrounding the bar; they were doing a splendid job of blocking any and all paths to the bartender. They seemed to be in the middle of watching some epic drinking game that involved a red faced, tall brunette girl. Then there was the second thing that annoyed Gajeel far more, and all too familiar face sitting on a stool at the only open corner. Familiar wasn’t even the right word, as Gajeel had just seen this man minutes ago, in his meeting. Before he had approached Levy, and here that same man still was, staring at the backend of the blond girl that had walked right by him until he had arrived at the bar, where someone was blatantly staring at her.

Gajeel stepped before the man promptly. His heavy boot thudding the ground loudly, in an attempt to get the idiot’s attention. His huge body purposely blocking his line of sight from the unaware girl he had been eyeing.

“Black Steel! Come on man! You’re blocking the view.” The man spoke in a deep voice. His neck was stretching up high in an attempt to look past Gajeel’s shoulder, with his beady eyes. He was obviously more concerned with what he was missing out on, rather than the glare Gajeel was sending his way.

He was a man of average height, with a decently muscular looking physique; his forearms looking like they held the most mass. His face was long, with a rectangular shaped chin and an oddly shaped nose that pointed downwards. The most noticeable thing about him though, was his frizzy, fro like hair that was sported into two puffs, one off to each side of his head. That and the fact that he was ugly.
Thibault.” Gajeel growled his name finally earning the man’s eyes. “What the hell are ya even doin’? Didn’t ya hear me say we were done here?” Gajeel questioned demandingly as he folded his arms over his chest. “You shoulda been gone with the rest of yer lackeys. Now you better hightail yer ass out, before I let yer boss know, you are still here.” Gajeel replied pointing a thumb over his shoulder. Thibault just looked at Gajeel, a huge cheeky smiling filling his face as his arms went out casually.

“Go ahead and tell’im.” He replied with a short laugh. “He won’t care, he is probably too preoccupied by now.” He added, making Gajeel close his eyes, as if wishing he hadn’t heard that part. “I’m not on the job right now, anyways. I’m just on the hunt. Look at this place, nice joint, with nice people.” He finished, his head following another girl that was walking by, just behind Gajeel as he spoke. Gajeel felt his stomach twist for a moment, as his teeth clamped down in disgust. He couldn’t stand Thibault, as far as he could tell at least. He hadn’t been working with his group that closely, but he already knew that much, from what little time he had spent with the man.

Their boss, Banaboster, was head of the Twilight Ogre organization. Their small claim to fame, being that they owned the only casino/hotel in Magnolia. Jose had started working with them recently for two major reasons. One being that their business was legal, and two being that their boss also disliked the other major power player in Magnolia, Makarov. They certainly weren’t Gajeel’s most favorite group to work with, but they were tolerable. They did as they were told, allowing Jose to pull the strings, because all they were really after was money. Gajeel had been able to remain patient with most of them for that reason, even though he found their money-grubbing ways and brutish personalities, annoying.

Then there was Thibault, something about this man got under Gajeel’s skin. He was Banaboster’s right hand man, just as Gajeel was Jose’s, so that meant he had been seeing him a lot lately and he had begun to notice a pattern. The way he looked and talked about women, there was something different about it. Gajeel couldn’t quite put his finger on it, but something just felt off. The words he would use just didn’t sit right with him. He hadn’t seen anything though, so he just let it go for the time being, but his distaste for the man only grew with each passing second in his company.

“You need ta leave.” Gajeel stated coldly with a steely glare, but Thibault just brushed him off. For whatever reason, he seemed quite unafraid of Gajeel.

“I’ll be leaving when I find the one I want.” Thibault answered back smugly, before smirking as he noticed Gajeel’s dead stare. He let loose that stupid boorish laugh of his, before responding to Gajeel’s fierce expression. “Come on Black Steel, lighten up! Works done and I’m not about to let a trip to a place like this, go to waste!” He exclaimed as Gajeel looked down at the ground with clamped teeth, he was trying to remain calm, but his folded arms were tensing up significantly. Thibault raised a long thin eyebrow up at Gajeel before continuing. “Besides… you can’t tell me you weren’t thinking the same thing?” He questioned coyly as if he somehow already knew, but Gajeel made no movement, except for a brief spasm of muscle as he could feel that deep seeded fury building within him. “Why else would you still be here then?” Thibault added, his head moving closer to Gajeel’s as if he was trying to be quiet. “There someone here, you plan on taking?” He asked slyly, draining the last of Gajeel’s patience. It wasn’t just what he was implying, but his word choice as well. There was just something malice in his phrasing, as if there was some kind of double meaning behind his words, a deeper darker purpose in store.

“Will you shut yer stupid fuckin’ mouth!” Gajeel snapped, his head going up with teeth bared. Thibault’s eyes glanced up and darted over the rage-fueled expression Gajeel carried, his hair reminding him of the fur, on an animal, when it’s bristled up and ready to attack. His fangs were also exposed, only furthering the image. He paused for a moment, staring at Gajeel bewilderedly, before finally allowing the small outburst to vanish from his mind with a new realization. He greeted
Gajeel’s face with a wide knowing grin, as if humored by his newfound idea.

“Well now I know that’s it! Why else would ya get so defensive?” He asked as he closed his eyes and shrugged his shoulders. “But for some reason ya don’t sound too happy.” He opened his eyes and sent Gajeel a far superior smirk, before continuing. “Did ya already get turned down or something? That’s too bad champ.” Thibault jested with mock concern, before following up with another deep laugh, but that was the last straw for Gajeel. His arm was already shooting out and grabbing the fabric of Thibault’s collar, pulling the man right off of the stool he had been sitting in. Thibault’s beady eyes grew wide as he was suddenly jerked forward, his face practically making impact with Gajeel’s narrow eyed stare.

“What did I tell you again…?” Gajeel hissed out, “Oh yea…” He answered his own question, his fingers squeezing the fabric of Thibault’s shirt tighter, as his arm muscles flexed with rage. “Shut your fucking mouth.” He made sure to state and annunciate each word clearly, before letting his arm fly back behind him, the man he had been holding, going with it. Thibault caught his balance as he glared at Gajeel’s back. Gajeel was now taking a seat in the bar stool he had just been planted in, not seconds ago. “I ain’t leavin just yet, because I planned on havin’ a drink and nothing more…” Gajeel added, still with his back to the man, as he waited in the bar stool to be noticed by one of the busy bar keepers. Thibault was standing with legs apart and a finger pointing at Gajeel accusingly, his eyebrows shot up the length of his forehead in irritation.

“You are a short-tempered son of a bitch! Can’t ya take a joke!?” He was yelling at Gajeel’s back, his voice a bit shaken.

“Cry bout it, why don’t ya then?” Gajeel replied with a roll of his eyes, taking his turn to fain concern now. “Now who’s the bitch?” He added mockingly his head turning, his red eyes landing on Thibault again, before turning back away, uninterested in whatever the idiot was going to say next. Thibault was shooting Gajeel his own glare as he began to yell again.

“I don’t need to take this from you! You’re not the boss of me! And just so ya know, you didn’t scare me away! I’m not going anywhere, not until I get what I want!”

“Fine. I don’t give a shit what ya do now. Just get the hell outta my sight.” Gajeel stated, his fist banging on the table. “Where the hell is the damn bar keeper!?” He shouted, his noise being drowned out, by the surrounding crowd. He really could use that drink right about now and he hated waiting for anything.

Thibault stood there, staring daggers at Gajeel’s back, with his hands firmly glued to his hips defiantly. Gajeel was completely ignoring him now and for some reason he felt accomplished about that. Now that Gajeel was no longer pushing him out the door, he could do as he pleased. And with that in mind, he finally walked away from Gajeel and the bar without another word.

Gajeel listened to Thibault’s footsteps as he finally walked away, before letting out a breath through his nose. His red eyes glancing back to where he had gone, maybe I will stick around a little longer than originally planned. What with that guy roamin’ around here, I feel like I oughtta… He sighed again. I do not like him… His thoughts spoke as his fist banged back down on the tabletop again.

“Oi! Bartender! Can I get some service over here er what?!?”

Levy was standing in the very same spot both Lucy and Gajeel had left her in mere minutes ago, watching the club goers around her uneasily. Most of them were standing in groups of at least three or more around a table, drink in hand and smile dawned on their faces as they conversed and laughed with one another. Others looked sweaty and lazy eyed, either drunk or just beat from dancing.
Couples were clinging to each other as if they might fall over without the other’s support in just about every corner of the room. The women were all dressed in short skirts and snug fitting dresses. Meanwhile the men were wearing fancy button up shirts with nice pants, or slacks.

Levy’s eyes darted around the crowded room, taking in the overall atmosphere of people enjoying themselves with a distressed look over her face, as she realized she was the odd man out. She was the tiny spec of gray among a fascinating array of colors, that filled that room and brought it to life. Standing out and away from the others, yet still unnoticed and completely alone. She looked nothing like any of these people, even dressed as she was and it had nothing to do with her looks and everything to do with who she was as a person. As much as she hated admitting it to herself, Gajeel had been completely right about her not being the kind of person to go to these types of places. Even when Lucy had been with her, she hadn’t acted any better really, because they were both just so out of their element and then there was Gajeel…

He didn’t belong with these people either. He certainly wasn’t dressed nice and he looked far too rough for a nice place like this. Although his actions spoke differently, Levy thought with an eyebrow lowered as she watched a man kiss the hand of his date, the image almost mirroring the way Gajeel had kissed her wrist.

Yes, the way Gajeel had moved in on her, actually reminded her a lot of the surrounding crowd. In fact, in the last few minutes she had just watched several men either snake an arm around their date or reach out a hand towards a girl, in an effort to kiss her with no argument on the woman’s part, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Levy glanced down at her wrist with a perplexed look. Was that supposed to be normal? Was that how the dating scene worked these days? She hadn’t thought so, but she was quickly realizing she really hadn’t any idea anymore.

Gajeel had seemed so forward to her, but maybe that was just how most people were these days? Maybe she had been the abnormal one by moving away from his advances? Maybe her thoughts on dating were all outdated and she needed to broaden her mind?

She paused again, her eyes glancing back up and noticing the familiarity, that the club goers carried for each other once more. It was just as Gajeel had been with her and why shouldn’t it be? He did know her after all, and maybe that was why she hadn’t felt as out of place, when he had been standing with her. But at the same time, she couldn’t help, but wonder how many of these people were actually just meeting for the first time. She had a sneaking suspicion that it was the majority of them, despite how comfortable they all seemed with each other and that thought, left a bad taste in her mouth.

No, the more she thought about it, maybe one-night stands with strangers were not what she wanted after all. Even though she had ranted about it earlier with Lucy. Her eyes went downcast, falling over her hand as she rung them together in front of her.

It would have to be someone I know. I can’t imagine being that intimate, with someone I’ve never met before. She thought as her mind drifted back to the way Gajeel’s hand had touched her cheek.

Her head snapped up at the memory making her cheeks flush. Not Gajeel, her mind affirmed, but this didn’t stop the images of him leaning into kiss her, from returning to her brain, making her eyes shift up towards the ceiling. He had been so persistent, yet careful with her in that moment and that hadn’t been what she had expected from him. Not with everything she knew about him thus far. His shady work, his arrogant personality, his rough voice, his scary appearance, his large physique and much to her own dismay of knowing this, but supposedly his sex as well... Gentle, not exactly being the word that came to mind when she thought about it.

She subconsciously brought a hand to her forehead in embarrassment; really wishing she hadn’t let
her mind wander in that direction. It would have to be a cold day in hell for her to actually admit to him, that she ever thought about that day. Her dignity holding out against that ego of his and over her own wants and desires, because when push came to shove, Gajeel Redfox was just bad news. He was not the kind of person she should ever get involved with, even if he had made it abundantly clear that he wanted her in that way. Even if deep down she kind of wondered what it would be like to spend a night with him…

“Levy!” Came Lucy’s voice crashing into her mind, causing her to jump right out of her scandalous thoughts. She let out a small alarmed squeak as the blond suddenly appeared in front of her. “I’m back and boy do I have news… For… You.” Lucy was saying her words tapering off as she got a look at Levy’s bright red face. “Um… you okay Levy?” She questioned with a tilt of her head and a puzzled face.

“Oh yea! I’m just great!” Levy uttered out with a brief innocent laugh.

“Why’s your face all red?” Lucy asked next, with narrowed eyes. Levy’s hands shot up to her face in alarm.

“Oh, is it?” She questioned, feeling the heavy warmth that had gathered in her own cheeks. Great… she was thinking. Damn you Gajeel! This is all your fault! If you had just left me alone, then my mind would have never of even gone there… Her thoughts complained as her hands dragged off of her face. “I think I just got kind of hot. That’s it really, so don’t worry.” She answered, trying to ignore the double meaning of her own words. Then she looked down, finally noticing that the blond was holding a drink in each hand. “What’re those?” Levy asked eyeing the drinks in Lucy’s hands. Lucy’s dark eyes scaled down to each drink in her hand, before glancing back up to Levy.

“Oh… oh yea! These are for us, because… Well…” Lucy paused, her eyes shifting up towards the ceiling “I think we’re gonna be here a while.” Levy stared at Lucy for a moment in confusion.

“I take it, you didn’t find Cana then?” She asked, but Lucy just smiled at her bitterly.

“Oh I found her.” She answered flatly.

“I feel like there’s a ‘but’, to this story.” Levy stated as she noticed Lucy’s less than thrilled expression.

“She’s on a one-way bus to margarita Ville and who knows when she’ll be back.” Lucy replied as her head neared Levy’s with an intense stare. “I mean oh my gawd Levy! Ya should have seen it! There’s like twenty guys all gathered around her at the bar, just watching her pound drink after drink! It’s ridiculous! I couldn’t even get near her!” Lucy exclaimed, her eyes going wide and her arms rising up some, but not too high as she was still holding the two very full glasses. Levy couldn’t help, but laugh at Lucy’s reaction and at Cana’s antics.

“I kind of wish I had!” She replied earning a smile from Lucy now.

“Well okay… It was pretty funny… But it also means we’re going to have to wait now, to leave. Luckily, I at least had a few dollars on me, so I was able to buy us these!” She cheered holding out one of the glasses towards Levy, who took the cold wet glass hesitantly. It was a large glass, full to the brim with ice and some kind of a dark liquid; it also had a lemon wedge on the rim. “It’s a long island iced tea.” Lucy stated. “Since we’re going to have to be stuck here, I figured we might as well drink a little to break the ice.”

“Yea… makes sense.” Levy replied eyeing the glass in her hand as its condensation ran down the sides.
“Try not to let it go to waste, because I used the last of my money on them… Unless you have any?” Lucy replied, adding the question to the end. Levy just gave her a bright looking smile and shook her head, her eyes closing.

“Nope!” She opened her eyes. “Not really at least! Sorry Lucy, I was kind of counting on Cana.” At that Lucy let out a breath and let her arm fall uselessly in front of her.

“Yea… me too. Last time we ever agree to let her ‘fund’ our night out.” She stated as if annoyed. “But whatever! It’s fine!” She added as if trying to convince herself of that, making Levy laugh once again.

“It will be!” Levy replied ringing her free arm with Lucy’s free one. “Now come on, if we’re going to be stuck here, we might as well try and make the most of it!” Levy said smiling brightly as she began to lead the blond.

“Oh yea? What’s gotten into you?” Lucy asked with a raised eyebrow as they began to walk through the crowd. “It’s like your mood’s done a 180.” She added with a laugh. “You’re acting like the Levy I remember before last weekend!” Lucy exclaimed referring to Levy’s normally chipper attitude. Overall Levy was usually a very positive person, cute and upbeat, but lately the stress had been weighing on her hard, since the incident with Jet and Droy the weekend before.

“Aw, I just wanta enjoy a night out with my best friend, is all! I’m just so tired of feeling sorry for myself. Let’s just have some fun.” Levy spoke pausing to glance up at Lucy with her large eyes. “Deal?”

Lucy also paused to glance back up at Levy, noticing the sincerity and seriousness that came over her friend’s features. Then she felt herself smile at Levy blissfully.

“Deal.” She answered and then the two girls continued their walk towards the crowded dance floor of the club.

After a few minutes of sifting through the ocean of people Levy and Lucy had finally made it back to the outskirts of the dance floor. The music was blasting around them forcing them to rely on body language to communicate with each other, unless they shouted or spoke right into the other’s ear. They decided to remain near the outer edge of the dance floor for the time being, so that they could drink a little before trying to really dance amongst the tight knit group of dancers.

Within minutes of drinking the cold liquid, Levy could feel the power behind the beverage she was sipping. It was a lot stronger than she had imagined it would be, especially for her tiny low tolerance body. She could feel the burn of tequila on her lips, as it splashed around the insides of her stomach, making her whole being warm. She had only had about a fourth of it, but she could already feel her brow dampening and her cheeks flushing. She looked from the glass in her hand, to her friend who was already beginning to dance a lot more as she also sipped at her drink.

She could feel the beat of the music through the floor and she couldn’t help, but move along with it faintly as well. Lucy had already downed about half of her drink and Levy could swear the blond was already feeling it as she watched her. How strong were these drinks really? It was entirely possibly Lucy was just dancing that way, to make her laugh, but Levy couldn’t really tell. Either way, she was definitely getting a kick out of watching the blond move. That was until she felt her chest constrict into tight knots and her stomach drop as if she had stood up too fast.

Levy’s head snapped up at the odd chilling feeling, as it was all too familiar. She looked over her
shoulder and was met with two red irises with black slit-like pupils, staring her down from across the room. It was Gajeel, still there and dawning her with that intense stare of his, this time the difference being she had caught him in the act. Before, it had been as if she had felt the weight of his eyes on her, but hadn’t actually spotted him. He was standing there with his back leaned up against the wall of the club, he had one foot propped up and his arms folded over his chest, with one hand clutching a half empty glass of gold liquid.

They met eyes for a brief second and Levy just glanced long enough to notice that he was smirking at her, before looking away, her head snapping forward again. Her eyes were wide as they went to the floor in front of Lucy’s feet. It was like there was no escaping him and she didn’t know what to do about it, other than to ignore him completely, but that was easier said than done. She could literally feel the presence of his stare scaling over her form and it was especially hard to ignore him, when she knew right where he was standing.

She closed her eyes for a moment, her brain started flooding with images of their earlier encounter. No! Stop it Levy! Don’t you see he’s doing this on purpose? He’s trying to get to you and you can’t let him! You can’t let him win! Her thoughts were screaming, you came here to have fun with your friends, don’t let Gajeel of all people get in your way! Levy opened her eyes, her brow going crossed with a determined face. Yea…! No way am I letting that happen, she thought as her head went back up, her fists clenching into tight balls as she let the wave of chills wash over her, in an attempt to rid herself of the uneasiness he brought on.

The knowledge of his presence was looming over her, like that of a human being looming over its own shadow, even when he was probably a good fifteen feet away. She held her head up proudly, before bringing her eyes back to the drink in her hand, maybe this will help me forget he’s here. And with that thought, Levy brought the drink to her lips and tipped it back as if trying to down the whole thing in a matter of seconds.

Lucy stopped dancing for a brief second as she noticed Levy attempting to aggressively down her drink. The blond quickly reached up grabbing Levy’s arm causing the girl to stop, before she could get much of the liquid down her throat. Levy just glanced up at Lucy, unaware of what she was doing, by stopping her.

“Whoa take it easy!” Lucy was shouting over the noise, her voice just barely audible. “Remember we only have one, what’s the hurry?!" Lucy asked with a shrug.

Levy just looked at her friend with an uneasy smile and let out a nervous laugh. Lucy was watching Levy for a moment as the shorter girl paused; she was trying to think up an excuse she could tell the blond for her hasty actions. But it was within these few seconds, that Lucy’s chocolate eyes shifted off of Levy slowly, to something that stuck out behind the shorter girl in the distance.

Levy was watching Lucy now, as her eyes grew abnormally large and her mouth fell open and her finger came up, clearly pointing at something. She had a pretty good idea of what her blond friend was fretting about, but she turned her head to glance over her shoulder once again, just to be sure. Her heart pounded against her chest, as she saw exactly what she had feared. Just as she had suspected, Lucy had finally noticed Gajeel standing there, eyeing her. She quickly turned back towards Lucy, praying he hadn’t seen the fearful look in her eye, grabbing the blonde’s pointing hand and forcing it down, bringing Lucy’s face close to hers.

“L-Levy!” Lucy was uttering into the shorter girl’s ear, clearly alarmed by the large scary looking man, with his eyes in their direction. “That scary guy over there! I’m pretty sure he’s staring at you!” She was exclaiming, causing Levy’s hand to go up and over the blonde’s loud mouth.

“Shh Lucy! I know!” Levy snapped. She had suddenly grown very paranoid of Gajeel overhearing
them, even though there was no way he possibly could over all of the noise. Lucy blinked at Levy, once the smaller girl’s hand was removed from her face.

“You noticed already?” Lucy questioned. “Well then why the hell didn’t you say anything?! We could have left this spot!” Lucy practically shouted at the girl, as if outraged. Levy paused, looking to the side with a roll of her eyes, before answering.

“Wouldn’t matter anyways…” She stated blatantly. “He would probably still find me either way. I figured I’d just try and ignore him.” She added, her head turning just enough so that she could see his dark shape in the corner of her eye. Lucy watched Levy for a minute, her face perplexed and her non-drink hand going to her hip sternly.

“Wait a minute! You mean to tell me that you know, that creep?!?” Lucy questioned as Levy looked back at her guiltily. Her eyes darted up to the ceiling and she hesitated before speaking.

“Well… I mean… You could say that.” Levy answered trying to be vague, but Lucy wasn’t buying it.

“Levy!” Lucy exclaimed earning the girl’s large eyes back on her. “What the hell?! How- how do you…” She began to say as her eyes went back up to the man who was still staring right in their direction with an evil smirk. She could feel herself gulping as she once again took in his huge frame and long hair, his many visible piercings and scars. She removed her brown eyes quickly as she could swear his red ones were piercing right through her and Levy’s back. “How the hell do you know him?!?” She finally choked out as if startled by this news.

Levy narrowed her eyes on Lucy for a moment, quickly coming up with something she could tell Lucy about how she knew Gajeel that wouldn’t involve anything legally sensitive. She slowly turned her head back to where Gajeel was standing, matching eyes with him almost instantaneously. He made no movement as Levy sent him a hard glare. If anything, his eyes just continued to bore into hers with far more force, as if nothing she could do would scare him away. Levy could feel herself breaking and then she finally snapped her head back towards Lucy, letting out a deeply frustrated breath, before glancing up at her friend with an irritated expression. Lucy just watched Levy, her face doing nothing to hide how baffled she was.

“Well?” She finally asked expectantly

“You remember that roommate I had sophomore year?” Levy questioned, causing Lucy’s eyes to glance up as she pondered the question for a moment, a finger on her chin.

“Hmm… yea… I think so… I didn’t know you all that well back then, but I think I remember… She had dark hair and glasses, right? Wanted to be an archeologist or something? She was getting some kind of science degree… Didn’t you say… She is the reason why; you live alone now?” Lucy asked back. Levy watched her with a less then pleased expression as she continued. “Yea… And she was always spouting nonsense about dragons once existing… or something?”

“Yep you got it. She’d be the one.” Levy answered.

“Yea…” Lucy recalled thoughtfully her eyes finally landing back on Levy’s face. “What about her?” Levy rolled her eyes again as she thought back to that night; she could feel her stomach rolling uncomfortably with the memories.

It was well past midnight by the time Levy finally made it home to her apartment building, after a long day of constant running around and the worst part was, that the work wasn’t over yet. She was
climbing the stairs to her apartment as she thought about the long night of cram studying she still had ahead of her. This whole entire week had been hell; she had easily worked thirty plus hours between her two jobs and she still had classes and homework to deal with, on top of it all.

Luckily her job as a student worker in the library of the university allowed her some time to work on her assignments, but her waitressing job was not nearly as forgiving. Unfortunately, the money she got in tips was too good for her to quit. Not only that, but the four-hour shifts were easy to work around with her school schedule. She would have most of her classes first thing in the morning, one right after another. Then a shift at the library, until the evening when she would have to go to the restaurant and work until close. Sure, it was exhausting, but right now the restaurant needed her, seeing as they had, had some people quit on them and the extra money was too helpful for her to pass up.

Although Levy could feel the regret within her now, as she climbed the last few stairs to her floor. Her feet and legs were aching, and her eyes were tired. She knew she wouldn’t be getting much sleep tonight, what with the test she had bright and early. She hadn’t been able to make much time to look over the material due to her hectic schedule that week, so she needed to study.

She slowly approached her apartment door, reaching down to dig out a key from her bag. She unlocked the door and opened it quietly, reaching to her right to flip on a switch from the wall, illuminating the room.

They lived in a large one-bedroom apartment. It wasn’t exactly ideal having to share a bedroom, but it was much more affordable. There was no way Levy could afford such a place on her own and all of the two bedrooms were just out of the question. She was just barely getting by as it was; basically, living on extra food from the restaurant and their money issues being the whole reason why she needed to pick up the extra available shifts to begin with. Luckily what the place lacked in bedroom count, it made up for in size as the open kitchen and main room were quite large.

Levy’s eyes darted around the empty room, taking in the overwhelming amount of silence. She glanced down, noting that there wasn’t a pair of shoes by the door. Her roommate appeared to be out for the night. She glanced up at the clock on the wall, reading the time. It was almost one in the morning; she began to take off her shoes and set down her bag on a bench by the door.

She was still wearing her work clothes and she felt like she smelled of food and grime. *There’s no way I’m starting this before I shower,* she thought to herself as she stepped into the bedroom to her left, not bothering to turn on the light. She marched past her roommate’s bed to her dresser, throwing it open and quickly grabbing a pair of bedtime shorts and a tank top to wear for bed. She then headed out the doorway to the far room on the right, which was their bathroom.

Levy carried out the rest of her routine almost in a haze as she stripped off her clothes and began to shower. Her mind was so beat and ready for sleep as the hot water rained down upon her. *Nope… She thought… You’re going to have to suck it up Levy… You’ve got to be ready for this test tomorrow…* Then that was when she heard a door slam and some loud laughter through the walls of the bathroom, interrupting her thoughts. She narrowed her eyes in the direction of the door, peering through the shower curtain.

*Hmm sounds like Daphne made it back…* She thought as she listened a little closer.

*Does she… Does she have someone with her?* Levy’s thoughts questioned as she thought she heard Daphne speaking to someone. It was hard to tell through both the door and the noise of the water. *Doesn’t matter… I’ve got studying to do.* Levy’s thoughts reminded her, as she brushed off the whole thing entirely and went back to finishing her shower.
Levy made sure to take her time, letting the warmth of the water and steam ease her stresses, before finally finishing her shower. Once that was done, she took some time to brush her teeth and floss before finally exiting the bathroom. She looked around, half expecting to see Daphne and a guest sitting in the main room, but it was empty. She looked down noticing only one shoe on the ground, one of Daphne’s shoes… *Hmm*… She thought glancing up, her head looking towards the bedroom.

The door was shut and the room looked dark and it was still quiet. *I wonder*… She thought to herself as she started to reach towards the doorknob, her fingers gracing it lightly so that it didn’t make any sound. She gently and slowly started to turn it and that was when she felt it stop abruptly.

Her eyes narrowed at this finding… *I knew it.* Someone was in there with her, for sure and she could only imagine what the two of them were doing. She folded her arms in aggravation. It wasn’t the first time it had happened, but it didn’t mean she was accustomed to being locked away from her own bed. *Swear to god Daphne you better have him out of here by morning.* She thought as she remembered the last guy Daphne had brought home with her, had stayed way past his welcome.

Levy turned away from the door and headed towards her bag, gathering her stuff up and heading towards a desk along the wall of their main room. It didn’t really matter all that much considering Levy wasn’t going to have much time for sleep anyways. She didn’t really have time to dwell on the matter either, as she set to work opening her books and getting out a notebook, so that she could write down notes to help her remember things. She made sure to put a bandana back in her hair, so that she could keep her messy bangs back and out of her face, as she bowed her head over the large book. She also put on her red reading glasses and then she finally got started. About an hour of smooth sailing passed by as Levy read and jotted down notes, everything was quiet and Levy’s focus was on high despite her exhaustion.

Then suddenly it all changed, as there was loud shrill scream that pierced right through the walls of their apartment, causing Levy to jump so high that she almost tipped over her chair. The blue haired girl was on her feet in an instant, standing in her tiny shorts. Her heart racing after having heard Daphne scream; she stood there for a moment, not knowing what to do. The scream had been so high pitched, as if Daphne was either in pain or was terrified of something.

Levy’s eyes grew as wide as they possibly could. Was it possible that the person she had brought home with her, was dangerous? Levy could feel herself beginning to panic, as terrifying images began to race through her mind. Images of Daphne cowering in a corner from a man with a large knife and then just lots of blood. Levy stood firmly planted on her feet as another scream invaded her ears, making her stare at the wall between the two rooms, as if paralyzed by whatever was happening in there.

Should I…? *Should I call the police?!* She was questioning in her panicked state. *Is there even time for that?!* She wondered, her body was beginning to shake as she heard Daphne let out another yell from behind the wall. *I—I’ve got to do something! I can’t just stand here!* Her thoughts screamed as a shaky hand began to reach towards the phone on their desk. Then her body jolted in fear once again, as she began to hear Daphne yell some more, this time in more continuous spurts.

Levy was just standing there listening in horror as Daphne’s voice continued to flood her ears, in a series of terrifying screams. Her mind now beginning to picture the man with the knife, coming after her next. Surely, he had to be finishing her off in there? At least that’s what Levy was imagining from the crazy sounds and then that was when silence struck.

Levy stood there for a moment, her heart was practically beating out of her chest at this point. *Oh, no….* She thought. *He’ll be coming for me next…* And it was with this thought, that she was finally able to get her feet to move, as she raced towards the door of their apartment. She didn’t even grab
anything or put on her shoes. Instead, she just reached towards the doorknob and it wasn’t even locked. Apparently, Daphne could remember to lock the bedroom door, but not the important one. Levy would have dwelled on it more in annoyance, if she didn’t fear for her life in that very moment. She threw it open and was about to step out when she heard another sound.

She hesitated, one foot already out the door, her head looking back towards the closed bedroom door with raised eyebrows. *Wait a minute. What?*

That was when she could hear Daphne’s shouts once again, but this time they weren’t just yells. There were actual words being made. Levy paused, her pounding heart beginning to slow down as she could finally make out what her roommate was shouting.

“Yes! Yes! YES!”

*Oh, dear lord.* A hand came flying up to Levy’s face in disbelief, as she felt like the biggest idiot in the world.

“Yes! YES! YES!” Came Daphne’s screams, more ferociously than the first time. Someone was finishing her off all right, but not in the way Levy had imagined. Levy was cringing as she closed the door to the apartment, making sure to lock it. She slowly dragged her feet back towards her desk, as she listened to more of her roommates’ shrill screams. She sat back down at her desk and stared at the open book in front of her, as Daphne’s yells continued to invade her ears, no longer making her panic, but instead just disgusting her.

She sat there for a moment listening to it all in a state of shock and distaste. She had never heard Daphne make such noises before and the whole thing was really quite unbelievable. It made her wonder what the heck he was even doing to her in there. Levy hadn’t brought anyone home since she had started living with Daphne, considering that they only had the one bedroom. She didn’t like the idea of forcing someone to deal with it. Not only that, but she hadn’t taken enough interest in anyone to actually consider doing ‘that’ with them. She looked at the wall in front of her, as Daphne’s sounds still came floating through it, realizing that she herself had never made such sounds even remotely close to what Daphne was making at that moment, during sex.

*Snap out of it Levy!* Her mind interrupted. *You need to just ignore them and get back to work.* She glanced up at the clock seeing that it was almost 3 A.M. already. *Great…* she thought as she looked back to the wall with her tongue out. *That’s going to be tough, if she keeps this up.* She thought, referring to Daphne’s shouts, that were still sounding off here and there. She sat there for a moment, trying to shrug it off, before leaning back over to her book. It didn’t really matter, because either way she needed to get this stuff in her head one way or another and so she began once again. *Besides it’s not like they’re going to be at it much longer from the sounds of it.*

But as the minutes passed by, Levy found that she was eating those words. The screaming hadn’t been constant, but each and every time Levy thought they were finally done, it would start back up again. Leaving her to wonder once again, what the hell they were possibly doing in there! All the noise making it incredibly hard for her to concentrate, but she toiled on through it all. Her hands running through her hair in frustration. Her eyes bloodshot, her body sore and her mind both burnt out, and incredibly angry as she forced her way through the slow process.

Finally, at some point, Levy had noticed that the noise of Daphne’s yells had finally died and stayed dead. She glanced up at the clock with two puffy and glossy eyes. It was almost six in the morning. Her shaky head slowly turned back towards her open book and then collapsed on top of it.

“I think… I’m just going to close my eyes for a few minutes…” She spoke to nobody as her heavy eyelids fell shut at long last.
“Levy… Levy…” Came a deep voice in Levy’s ear.

*That voice… I know it. Who does it belong to again?* Levy’s thoughts questioned in a haze. She could feel her head resting on something cool and hard; her body was hunched over and in a chair, not her bed. Her eyes slowly blinked open as there was a gold light filling the room she was in, sunlight from the window.

Her head slowly turned, so that she was resting her chin against an open book. Her neck was stiff with pain, as she started to recall where she was. Her eyebrows were mangled together in confusion and her eyes squinted from the brightness, as she lifted her body up slowly from the desk. *Wait… I thought I heard someone?* She thought as she reached up for something digging into her face, near her eyes. It was her glasses; they had been pressed up against her skin, leaving indents. She was just pulling them off of her face and setting them down on the desk, when she heard the voice from her dream return.

“Hey shrimp.”

*Shrimp…?* Levy’s mind repeated, taking a few seconds longer than normal to register what she had just heard due to her sleepy state. Then it hit her like a bucket of ice-cold water. Her eyes shooting open all of the way, as she realized he was standing right there behind her. The only person who had ever called her by that nickname. Her head whipped around and there he was, with a shit-eating grin on his face.

“Gajeel!” Levy shouted, jumping to her feet as she leaned back against the desk. She was basically trying to get away from him. “What the hell are you doing here?!” She screamed in both shock and outrage. Gajeel’s arms unfolded as he exposed his teeth before speaking,

“Gi hi! Isn’t it obvious?” Levy didn’t even respond to the question, she just pointed towards the door instead.

“Get out! NOW!” She screamed. Her hand was shaking; she was clearly nervous of his sudden random appearance in her home.

“Wow… Well that ain’t very nice.” Was all he said as his grin disappeared and he folded his arms, his eyes closing. Levy stared at him in disbelief, her body still quaking with fear. She didn’t understand why he was there in her apartment. Was he after her? Did he think she had told someone about Bora maybe? What was he going to do to her? She was very much afraid of him and greatly bewildered by the way he was acting, as if this was a perfectly normal, casual thing. She had thought she would never see him again and yet here he was, standing only feet away from her, in her apartment.

“What do you want with me!?” She gasped out, making Gajeel open his eyes and shoot her a more serious look.

“Man, yer really freakin out.” He stated. “Just breathe. I ain’t here to hurt you if that’s what you think.” Levy stared at him with her doe-like eyes, taking in what he had just said for a moment. She was still backed up against the desk, her tense body beginning to ease some.

“You’re not?” She questioned softly. Gajeel watched her for a few seconds, his sights slowly scaling
over her body, as he couldn’t help, but notice the rise and fall of her chest as she took each shaky
breath. His eyes were gliding around the contour of each one of her breast, which he could see
perfectly outlined in the tank top she was wearing. Before trailing down to her heavily exposed
thighs and naked legs. The shorts she had on were so tiny and tight; that they made it hard for him to
not stare at the wholeness and scope of her backend. He quickly had to turn his head away after
getting a look, his mind already starting to go haywire after just that short glance towards her.

“No.” He answered flatly as he felt heat on the back of his neck. Levy glanced down at the floor; air
was floating out of her mouth in relief. She looked back up at Gajeel, his head was still turned
elsewhere; it was as if he was trying not to look at her. His arms were folded over his thick chest and
Levy found herself staring at the shape of each spiraling muscle that went through them.

“Okay… Well then…” She hesitated. “Why are you here?”

“You’ve got a roommate, don’t ya?” Gajeel answered her question with one of his own. Levy’s eyes
went wide as the pieces were finally sliding together with his last few words.

“YOU!” She screamed, an angry finger pointing in his direction accusingly. Gajeel’s eyes widened
some at the reaction. He stared at her in wait of whatever she was going to say next.

“What?” He asked, not understanding where her sudden outburst was coming from.

“You are the whole reason I didn’t get any sleep last night, that’s what! You kept me up all night,
with whatever the hell you were doing to her in there!” She pointed to the wall behind her now,
where the bedroom was. “I want to kill you right now!” Her arms flew up above her head. “I was
trying to study! You made it practically impossible!” Levy finally finished with her rage, her voice at
top volume; her anger was so forthcoming that it made her dizzy. Gajeel was just staring at her
blankly; he looked caught off guard as silence filled the room. Then after a few seconds he started to
smirk at her, making Levy’s arms fall to her sides in aggravation.

“You heard all that eh?” Levy had to roll her eyes at the question; she was about ready to pull her
hair out.

“Of course I did! I live here!” She shouted as if he were slow. Gajeel snickered at her, before leaning
forwards some.

“So does that mean, you’d like to know what the hell I was doing to her in there?” Gajeel asked,
taking the words right from Levy’s mouth. She just stared at him, her brow low with annoyance.

“I think I have a pretty good idea, okay. Thanks.” She answered back curtly, before folding her
arms. Gajeel’s eyes wavered up and down Levy’s form again, making her cheeks feel warm as she
just realized what she was wearing.

“Really?” He asked taking a step closer. “You sure you ain’t at all interested after having to listen to
it, all night long?” He questioned smoothly, taking a second step closer to her as he brought his face
down near hers. “Cause I know I’d sure as hell, like to hear your voice sing to me in rhythm.” Levy
stood there, her face going beet red, not believing he had just had the gull to say such a thing to her.
He was seriously hitting on her, after just having sex with her roommate!

“Get out of my face! You don’t even know me!” At this Gajeel backed up some, giving her back
some space, before looking at her with a wide side smile.

“I do know you. Hell, I know you better than what’s her face.” He replied referring to Daphne.
“Levy McGarden.” He said her name, making Levy look at him oddly.
“How do you- Have you been stalking me or something?!” She questioned as if alarmed.

“Don’t be crazy now… Just think back for a minute, I bet you can figure it out.” He replied. Levy paused for a moment thinking back to the night she had first seen Gajeel, trying to remember it all. It wasn’t all that hard seeing as she hadn’t been able to forget it, even as much as she wanted to. Her eyes got wide as she shot him a look full of realization.

“My books!” She exclaimed. “I left them there in the alleyway. I remember going back for them the next day and they were all gone. Then being really upset, that I had to go and buy them again.” She glanced down. “They were so expensive… I had my name on them, just in case I ever lost them.” Gajeel nodded at her. “You took them?” She asked.

“Yea, course I did. I couldn’t leave them there with your name and prints on ‘em.”

“Yea.” She responded. “If someone had found them close to that fire or close to where you had…”

“Bora.” Gajeel spoke the name for her, as Levy had hesitated before saying it. “Yea… you get it now. Didn’t wanna leave any kind of evidence that could cause you trouble.” Levy looked to him with sad eyes.

“Why…? Why did you do that?” Gajeel scoffed at her question.

“Cause you shoulda never been involved in the first place.” He answered. “It was my fault you got tied up in the whole thing. The Salamander set that building on fire to try and stop me, while I was interrogating Bora in there. He distracted me and Bora got away.”

“The Salamander?” Levy repeated.

“Some idiot, look, never mind it. The point is, I was sloppy. And I ain’t gonna let someone like you, get caught up in the crossfires of my mess.” Levy glanced down again, her eyes looking forlorn.

“You know you told me to forget that night Gajeel, but I haven’t been able to.” She glanced up into his eyes. Gajeel couldn’t help, but get lost in the innocent gaze she was sending his way. “I still wonder what you did to him and I feel the guilt of knowing, that I couldn’t do anything to stop it.” He stared at her for a few seconds allowing her words to take heed.

She wasn’t the only one who felt that way, because ever since he had met her, he also had been plagued with guilt whenever he thought of her, over the things he did. In fact, he could feel it now, as she graced him with her large doe-like eyes. And all he could think was, that it was all of her fault that he felt that way now. Gajeel closed his eyes and let out a frustrated breath.

“Look… I didn’t kill’im.” He finally stated, wondering if he would regret telling her this.

“You mean he’s alive?” Gajeel couldn’t help, but sigh at her question.

“How the hell should I know?” He snapped back. “I’m just sayin I didn’t do the job.”

“You… You turned him into Jose, didn’t you?” Levy suddenly asked, her voice high with realization. Gajeel looked at her with wide eyes as if not knowing what to say.

“How the hell?” He started, but Levy cut him off with a point of her finger.

“That symbol tattooed on your arm.” She answered as she pointed at the black mark on his right shoulder. Her hand then dropped down before continuing, “I’ve had time to think about it and I’ve seen it before. It’s an insignia, the Phantom Lord Enterprise.” Levy folded her arms, “And everyone
in this town knows of the man behind that organization. The only question is… Why has he got someone like you, working for him and what has he got you doing? I mean… talk about shady. As far as I knew, Jose only involved himself in legal business, but now I’m not so sure.” Levy asked raising an eyebrow at Gajeel, who was staring at her as if mortified by everything she had figured out.

“You better keep those questions to yer self!” He snapped, getting angry.

“Is that a threat?” Levy questioned.

Her voice was so defensive, making it clear she didn’t understand the severity of his warning and Gajeel couldn’t stand for that. She needed to grasp the consequences of her own words and so he approached her without warning. She backed up against her desk in fear, as his large body began towering over her small frame. “S-stay back!” Levy replied, her voice shaking as she watched his hand come towards her. She slammed her eyelids shut and cringed as she felt his large hand take hold of her bare arm, just below the shoulder in a jerking motion. “Please!” Levy hollered, her voice pleading.

“Levy.” Gajeel growled her name. His hand was still wrapped around her bicep, but he made no other movement other than the initial jolt of grabbing her. “Levy!” His voice barked. “Levy look at me!” He snapped, finally making Levy cautiously open one eye. She could see his face looking down into hers with a very serious look, as if his very life depended on what he was about to say. She opened both eyes and turned her head to look at him fully now.

“W-What is it?” She uttered out, a sickening feeling washing over her.

“Nobody can know who I work for, you got me? You can’t tell anyone.” He stated, his voice demanding.

“Don’t you think you should have thought about that before you got that tattoo?” She replied bravely, despite how panicked she felt in his grasp.

“Levy! Just promise me you won’t say anything!” Gajeel shouted, becoming irate.

“I won’t!” She finally yelled back. “I hadn’t planned on it anyways! Don’t you think if I was going to tell anyone, I would have done it already?! It’s been almost a year Gajeel!” Gajeel paused at her words, his red eyes piercing right into her large gold ones. They looked glossy and full of fear, as he searched them for sincerity. He was so close to her now and his hand was still in contact with her skin and he knew right then, that he needed to back away. He finally let her go. His fingers sliding off of her arm and then he rose up, his eyes never leaving hers.

“Good.” Was all he said next as Levy once again eased her body up and off of the desk.

“Good? That’s all you have to say?” She questioned, now sounding outraged herself.

“Why? Am I forgettin’ something shrimp?” He questioned, as the tension between them began to fade.

“I don’t know?!” Levy cried out as if exasperated by the whole thing. “First you’re in my apartment waking me up! Then I find out you were the one keeping me up! Then you tell me you already know my name, when I never even told it to you! And then all of this other ‘stuff’ too and you just end it all with ‘good’? I mean really?! What am I supposed to do with that Gajeel?!” Levy finished, practically out of breath by the end of her long rant. Gajeel blinked for a moment, his arms folding and his signature grin filling the span of his face again.
“Well, I could think of a few things we could do.” He replied, making Levy scoff in disgust.

“Haven’t you done enough of that for one night? It felt like I was listening to her screams, for an eternity.” Gajeel’s eyes glanced up towards the ceiling.

“Yea tell me about it. That bitch is crazy.” He replied, “She kept goin on about dragons… And then next thing I know she was callin’ me one. It was fucking weird. I mean granted she was drunk, but is she usually like tha-?” Gajeel glanced back down at Levy as he spoke, who was shooting him a shut-the-hell-up-I-am-not-amused-by-this-story, kind of a look and so he finally stopped talking. “Oh...” He said, before continuing, “Now that’s quite the look. What’s the matter shrimp? You jealous?” He asked with a smirk. “Must be hard to not want it, after having to hear it.”

“Just get out of my apartment.” Levy replied flatly, pointing towards the door for a second time. “I’ve got a test to take in about twenty minutes and I just don’t have time for you Gajeel.” She added, her tone clearly impatient. Gajeel looked at her for a moment, his grin never fading.

“Look at you, such the hard worker and the perfect student. Do you ever have any fun?”

“Get out!” Levy snapped causing Gajeel to lift up his hands in defense.

“Fine, don’t worry. I’m leavin’, I don’t wanna be here when psycho wakes up anyways.” He stated, as he started heading towards the door.

“Oh, that’s real nice.” Levy replied. “If you really feel that way, then why did you sleep with her?” Levy asked as she watched Gajeel grab his large black boots. He sat down on their bench and began slipping the first one on. He just shrugged slightly as he put on the second boot without even looking up at her, as he felt her eyes on him.

“Cause it was easy and I am a man.” Was all he said, making Levy just stare at him as if sickened by the answer. He looked back up at her, catching her look with his red eyes, no smirks on his face this time.

“Why do you care?” He asked in return.

“I don’t.” She spat, making him smile weakly as he stood back up, walking away from her to grab his shirt.

“Yea… alright.” He replied from over his shoulder. His voice sounding so disbelieving, but he didn’t argue with her and so Levy stayed quiet, even though it annoyed her.

Then finally much to her relief, he was on his way out the door at last and she was following just behind him, so that she could lock it once he was out, but of course he couldn’t just leave without getting the last word in. He took a step out into the hall of the complex, but then turned back to look at her again, before she could close the door all of the way.

“Until next time shrimp?”

“No Gajeel. There won’t be a next time.” She muttered, before slamming the door. Gajeel just stared at it and laughed before walking away.

Levy stood there on the other side of the door and all she could think was, this… This is my life… And it was with that thought, that she hurried into her room to get dressed for class.

“No way!” Came Lucy’s yell just as Levy had finished telling her the story. She had made sure to
leave out basically the whole part about how she had already met Gajeel once before and any
mentions of Jose. “You mean to tell me, that Daphne hooked up with that!” Lucy questioned with
her finger pointing towards Gajeel. Levy grabbed at Lucy’s hand and ripped it down again, shooting
the blond another annoyed look. As if it even mattered if she drew more attention to them at this
point, considering Gajeel was already staring at them.

“Yes, and I had to hear about it for days after! About how great the sex was, as if I hadn’t already
heard enough while they were doing it! It was so annoying! She didn’t even know his name, but I
do...” Levy replied as she turned back around to look at Gajeel blatantly with a hard stare. “His name
is Gajeel Redfox, and he is bad news...” She explained, her eyes staring daggers at him as his smirk
widened into a fang-revealing grin. Those red eyes of his were laughing at her, just as they had that
morning in her apartment.

Chapter End Notes

I'm here outside when you're ready (when you're ready for me)
Think about the shots and confetti (all night)
I'll take you home if you let me
Just promise you won't forget me
'Cause the days get brighter when you're here
So I gotta keep you near

Goin' crazy and I just can't get you outta my head
Love is in the atmosphere, you can feel it in the air
Gettin' hazy and I just can't get you outta my head

Just can't get you out of my head

You locked the door and it's raining
But baby I'm not complaining, no
We hit the road and we're racing, yeah
You make me super impatient
Can you feel the tension?
You've got my attention
I know we're just friends
But I'd rather be together
'Cause the days get brighter when you're here
So I gotta keep you near

Goin' crazy and I just can't get you outta my head
Love is in the atmosphere, you can feel it in the air
Gettin' hazy and I just can't get you outta my head

Just can't get you out of my head
My head, my head, my head, my head
My head, my head, my head

(Can't get you out of my)
My head, my head, my head, my head
(Can't get you out of my head)
Just can't get you out of my head

“Outta My Head” By Khalid, John Mayer
Chapter Summary

Lucy tries to say something to Gajeel, but Levy is able to reign her in. They try to go back to having a good time, but are again interrupted by another charming face who sweeps Lucy off her feet. Gajeel once again has to deal with Thibault and is seeing red once Levy gets involved. Levy ends up getting herself into a very bad situation.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 4: Fangs

Lucy had a perplexed gaze fixated on Levy’s back, as she mused over the story her smaller friend had just finished telling her, about the man who was still staring wickedly in their direction. Levy didn’t notice the blonde’s pondering, as she was too focused on sending her own menacing glare back towards Gajeel. The display of tension between the two, while in the midst of their stare off was so thick, that Lucy could swear she saw it manifesting a wave of dark energy between the two of them.

Gajeel was eyeing Levy with a look that resembled that of a hungry wolf, staring down a sheep before leaping in for the attack, but unlike a sheep, Levy was perfectly aware of him. Her body was stiff and strong, her feet firmly planted and her fists clenched in animosity towards him. Lucy had never seen Levy give anybody such a look like that before. The whole thing was just too bizarre, it had the blond scratching her head in confusion.

What the hell is going on here? Lucy’s thoughts questioned. Okay, so sure. Gajeel had slept with Levy’s roommate a year or two ago. And yea, sure… Levy had, had to listen to it, in all of its awkward glory and then he had harassed her about it. Definitely making him out to be an ass and maybe a sexual deviant. That was all understandable and Lucy could see why Levy didn’t much care for a person like that. Not to mention his overall appearance was just terrifying, but it still didn’t explain the vibe of familiarity the blond was witnessing between them.

It was almost as if Lucy was missing something, that one crucial piece of the puzzle, that just made the whole picture come together clearly. She just kept asking herself… Why, why are they looking at each other like that? There was just so much emotion hanging between the two of them, albeit negative, that Lucy could swear their history with each other, was far more intimate than Levy was letting on.

“Uh… Levy?” Lucy uttered, finally gaining Levy’s attention back, as she turned her head back toward the blonde’s troubled features. The smaller girl’s expression had immediately relaxed, once she ripped her eyes off of Gajeel and matched them to Lucy’s.
“What is it, Lu?” She questioned, as if nothing peculiar had happened. Lucy reached a hand out to Levy’s shoulder, gripping it tensely.

“Are you alright?” She asked seriously, her face grim. Levy just blinked at the blond, not quite understanding. “What I mean is…” Her voice got quieter and her face closer, so that Levy could hear what she was going to say over the music of the club. “Is there something you’re not… Telling me about?” Lucy’s eyes motioned towards where Gajeel stood, but then dead bolted back to Levy’s, “Him.”

Levy’s eyes grew significantly larger at Lucy’s words. Her mouth fell open and her eyebrows mangled in worry. Does Lucy know more than I thought? Levy’s mind questioned, as she could feel herself beginning to panic. Wait, how could she? I didn’t tell her anything else… Was her next thought. She kept her eyes skimming back and forth over Lucy’s hard stare, as she continued to think, worriedly. Unless! Unless she’s heard of Black Steel Gajeel before? Could that be it!? Does she maybe know Gajeel? Levy slammed her eyelids shut, as concern continued to cloud her mind.

Lucy was watching Levy, with no idea of what she was really fretting over, but the blond did clearly notice that her friend looked distressed, from the way the smaller girl was acting. Lucy was now sure that, the suspicion she had been hinting towards was dead on and it made her deeply fearful for Levy. The hand she had rested on Levy’s shoulder was squeezing it tighter, making the smaller girl finally open her eyes.

“Levy… I know you’re scared, but you can tell me… If that man is stalking you, you need to tell someone!” Lucy stated firmly.

“What?” Was all Levy could choke out, completely flabbergasted by the blonde’s conclusion. Lucy let go of Levy’s shoulder and turned away from her, so that she could fold her arms to the best of her abilities while still holding her drink. Just in an effort to send Gajeel her own angry, crossed look.

“If he’s after you, then he’s in for more than he bargained for!” The blond cheered out, boldly.

“Wait… Lucy. No…” Levy was saying, but Lucy had now moved her free hand to her hip.

“I’ll send Natsu after him if I have to! He wouldn’t blow off something like this! In fact, I think I’ll go send that jerk a little warning right now! Then maybe he will leave us alone!” Lucy cried out, as she began to charge towards Gajeel like a woman on a mission. He noticed Lucy stomping towards him, but he didn’t appear at all impressed by the blonde’s dagger stares. Before Lucy could get more than a few steps away, Levy was grabbing her arm and pulling her back.

“Lucy wait!” Lucy stopped to turn and look at Levy.

“Levy! What are you doing?! Somebody’s got to go and tell this asshole off or else he’ll never leave you alone!” Lucy replied, outraged, as she turned to walk away again.

“But he isn’t stalking me!” Levy cried out, stopping the blond again. This time. Lucy’s body paused and Levy just sat there and watched as the blond slowly turned to look at her with an even more confused face than before.

“He’s not?”

“No.” Levy answered bluntly, shaking her head. Lucy brought a finger up.

“Then I don’t get it.” Was all she said. Levy looked at Lucy with a tilt of her head and her eyebrows pushing together.
“I told you everything already. What more is there to get, exactly?” She questioned the blond.

“You!” Lucy exclaimed, pointing at Levy this time. Then her arms went up, “This whole situation! The way you were looking at each other! I’ve never seen you look at someone like that before! You look so pissed off… If he’s not stalking you, then what’s the deal?! You can’t tell me it’s just, because of the roommate thing that one time, like two years ago! And the way he’s looking over here?! It’s creeping me out!” Lucy finished, her arms going down.

“He’s just trying to get to me. That’s what he does.” Levy replied calmly.

“I think he’s trying to eat you.” Lucy stated, making Levy’s eyes go large.

“Lucy!”

“What?! You don’t think so? What kind of look do you think it is then? Can you please explain it to me Levy? Huh?!” Lucy replied curtly.

“Just shut up or he will hear you! I don’t want him to know that we are talking about him, because then he wins! I just want to ignore him…” Levy answered, folding her arms

“What…?! Hear us? Seriously Levy? What is he, a dog? He can’t hear us from all the way over there!” Lucy stated as she glanced Gajeel’s way, then looked back at Levy like she had lost her mind. “Besides, I still don’t understand what’s going on between you two. I still feel like you’re not telling me something.”

“Alright!” Levy unfolded her arms and shot Lucy and annoyed, but serious glare. “He came up to me when you were at the bar, okay! Are you happy with that answer?” Lucy moved her head back to look over her friend slyly.

“Okay, now we’re getting somewhere at least.” She answered arrogantly, making Levy sigh and bring a hand to her forehead. “So… What did he want?” Lucy asked next, letting the word hang as Levy let her hand run through her hair in frustration.

“He just wanted to bug me!” She snapped, making Lucy glare at her disbelievingly, with an eyebrow raised.

“Is that all?” She questioned sarcastically and Levy nodded. “Oh come on! You must not think very highly of me, if you expect me to believe that! I think he came onto you!”

“Would it matter?!” Levy replied, “It’s not like I would go along with it anyways!”

“Ha! I knew it!” Lucy cried out with a finger pointing at Levy and a satisfied smile. “He did come onto you, didn’t he? You are a terrible liar Levy.” Levy’s arms fell down at her sides as she looked up at Lucy with her own eyebrow arched this time.

“So what?” She gasped out. “What’s your point?”

“My point is, you rejected him and now he is staring at us, or did you forget? Because I can’t and I don’t like it.” Lucy replied.

“Just ignore it.”

“That may work for you, but I on the other hand…” Lucy started to say as she whipped around. “I think I’m gonna go tell him off…” The blond mumbled, making Levy grab her again, before she could walk away.
“No! No! Please Lucy, don’t!” Levy cried out making the blond glance at her again, due to how desperate she sounded. She looked at Levy’s pleading gold eyes. “Please don’t talk to him Lucy. Please just do as I ask and let it go this time.”

“But Lev-”

“I know you don’t understand, but just trust me on this one. Please, just let this go.” Levy begged, desperately not wanting to get Lucy involved with anything having to do with Gajeel. He was trouble with a capital ‘T’ and that was the last thing Lucy needed right now, but there was just no good way to explain that to the blond without revealing all of the things that she couldn’t say about him.

Lucy paused; taking in the seriousness of Levy’s expression and the worried tone in her voice. Levy continued as Lucy watched her, now feeling like maybe she was breaking through to the blond, “Why don’t we just move more towards the center of the dance floor? There will be so many people there that he won’t be able to see us…” Levy offered, her head turning towards where the crowd was packed. Her eyes still holding the weight of worry in them.

“Okay…” Lucy finally answered, her mind deciding not to push the matter any further. “If that’s what you want, but Levy… If something was wrong you’d tell me, right?” Lucy asked, making Levy smile at the blond, both thankfully and relieved.

“Of course I would Lucy. As I said earlier, please don’t worry.” Levy reached up and grabbed Lucy’s free hand. She could still feel the weight of Gajeel’s red eyes on her with every move she made. “Let’s just go dance.” Lucy looked at her face for a moment and then smiled.

“Yea! Let’s do it!” She cheered as she allowed Levy to pull her into the tight crowd. “Besides-” Lucy started to say as the two girls weaved through the dancing bodies to try and conceal themselves from Gajeel’s stare. “I still got half my drink left!”

Just as Lucy had uttered these happy words a body shoved hard into her side, nearly knocking her over. Luckily Lucy caught her balance, so that she didn’t fall, but her glass was not so lucky as it flew out of her hands and then shattered onto the ground. Lucy paused staring at the broken glass near her feet.

“My drink!” Levy stopped after hearing the glass break and turned back towards Lucy.

“Lucy? What happened?” She questioned catching her friend’s enraged look.

“Oh… Somebody is going to pay…” Lucy growled between gritted teeth, her head going up and glancing around.

“Well, wait who-?”

“Oh, were you the one I bumped into? I’m sorry about that…” Came a polite male voice from behind the blond. Levy looked up to the person who had just spoken to them. The first thing her eyes fell on was his wild mop of red hair, which flew out in most every direction, in large thick sweeping locks. The overall shape and color of it reminded her of a lion’s mane, because of the way the strands framed and cascaded around his face, and what a face it was…

This man’s features were graceful, from his nicely angled and symmetrical brow, to the length and subtleness of his nose. His cheeks were full, giving him a very boyish charm appearance, but his jaw line was finely pointed which provided his face with a balance of masculinity as well. His whole look was made complete by two large alluring eyes, masked in a pair of shades that rested on his
nose. The shape and narrow cut of them, gave him an intense almost regal appearance, as though he were a man of weight and righteousness.

Slowly Levy glanced down, taking in the rest of him briefly. His body was lean and of average height with very light skin. He was finely dressed in a burgundy button up shirt and nice black pants and black dress shoes. The most noticeable thing about his physique was the build of his proud shoulders and his strong posture; as a whole he was a very good-looking guy.

He stood there looking at Levy apologetically as he continued to speak in a warm, but charming voice.

“It’s just so crowded in here.” He was starting to say. Levy looked from the man speaking, to Lucy’s face. The blond had yet to turn around and see the person speaking to them and ultimately taking responsibility for the hate crime against her drink. Her brow lowered in annoyance for a brief second before she slowly began to turn around, just as the culprit began to speak again,

“I was trying to be careful, but…” His words trailed off as he watched the blond stand up straight and turn around to face him fully now. Lucy greeted the stranger with a clearly upset look on her face as if on the verge of an outburst. Her dark eyes were practically in flames.

“I…” He was starting to say as he got his first gander of her. Levy was watching the two of them now. The man’s eyes had grown wide once he got a glimpse of the enraged blonde’s expression and he seemed to forget whatever it was he had been saying for the moment. Lucy on the other hand, was about ready to explode. Levy felt herself swallowing nervously, here it comes… She was thinking just as the blond finally snapped.

“You what?!” Lucy cried out, “Careful?! You made me lose my drink! How is that careful?! And I’m broke! Not to mention stuck here, because of my drunk ass friend! I was fine with all of that though! FINE! Fine with my dad harassing me! Fine with my best friend ignoring me! Even fine, with being stuck in this hellhole of a club for the night, with all of its bitchy people and staring creeps, because at least I had my drink! But now! NOW, it’s gone!” She pointed towards his chest as she continued to unload all of her stresses on the poor unsuspecting soul. “And it’s all because of you! How the hell am I supposed to have a good time now?!” She finished, glaring at him, her eyes burning with rage.

Levy was watching them nervously as if another ‘incident’ was about to break out like earlier. She ran a hand through her blue hair, why does this keep happening to me… She thought hopelessly as she awaited the trouble Lucy’s outburst was sure to bring on.

There was a long pause as the man before them just blinked at Lucy, with wide eyes. Drinking her in, as if she was something he needed to see now, otherwise he might not ever get another chance. Meanwhile, Lucy just had her hands on her hips and her eyes closed. Her face was stern with anger as she waited for either, another apology or a fight, almost anything really, but what he said next.

“Wow.” He uttered. Lucy opened her eyes and glanced up at him, as if confused by the one-word sentence.

“Huh?” The blond let out, Levy was also looking up at the man greatly confused. Then without warning his hand was coming up and reaching for Lucy’s, taking her hand into his gently. Lucy looked down at the cupped hands he held up before her, noticing the coolness of a large gold band on his index finger. She stood there frozen as her mouth fell open. Why was he touching her all of the sudden!? She slowly and rigidly moved her head up to look back at his face; he was smiling at her serenely, but his eyes were full of confidence, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.
“You are so beautiful.” He stated, his tone so full of devotion, yet assurance, as if he knew what he was saying was brilliant. “And passionate!” He added, making Lucy’s cheeks immediately flush a bright red, as her mouth stayed hanging open. Levy’s face didn’t look much different, just less vibrant at the handsome stranger’s bold words.

“I-I-uh… what…?” Lucy choked out nervously as her body began to quiver awkwardly. The man bowed his head to her some, bringing her hand up closer to his face.

“I can see that you’ve had quite the rough night and I hate, that I have added to that in any way. I hope you will forgive me.” He spoke as it became clear that he was going to kiss the top of Lucy’s hand, like an old-fashioned gentleman.

“Oh-you, you don’t haveta-” Lucy was stuttering between breaths as he gently touched her hand with his lips briefly. “Oh-well okay…” She uttered as he brought her hand back down and his eyes went back up to hers. She looked back, feeling paralyzed by the look on his face. Oh my god… Did he actually just do that?! Who does that kind of thing anymore?! Who is this guy?!

Her mind was questioning frantically as he looked at her serenely. She could feel the warmth in her face only growing with each passing second in his sights. Her heart was beginning to pound harder and her body was beginning to feel twitchy as he let go of her hand.

“Nonsense.” Was his response to Lucy’s earlier protest, “I want to be a proper gentlemen.” He added as he brought a hand up to his chest with the other hand going out towards her. “So please, let me make it up to you…” He finished.

“Uhh…” Lucy was saying as her head shifted in Levy’s direction, but her eyes stayed glued to his sincere face. “Levy…?” She whispered out from the side of her mouth nervously.

At this point Levy, had gotten over her shock and was smiling coyly, as if she might burst out laughing at any second. The polite man seemed completely taken by Lucy, despite how rude she had been and Lucy just hadn’t any idea on how to deal with it. Levy brought a hand over her mouth to stifle her giggling, as she answered her distressed friend.

“Yea…. Lucy?” She asked back slyly.

“You wouldn’t happen to know this guy too, would you?” The blond questioned quietly under her breath, as the red-haired man, smiled at her. Levy giggled lightly before answering,

“No definitely not. Sorry Lucy!”

“Greaaat…” The blond replied rolling her eyes, before looking back up at the man who was waiting patiently. He paused for a moment, once Lucy’s attention seemed to be back on him.

“So what do you say? Would you let me buy you a drink? To make up for the one I made you lose, that is?” He questioned politely, that charming smile widening.

“I…um… well…” Lucy was beginning to stutter, making Levy roll her eyes and then elbow her sharply. “Ouch..! Oh… What I mean to say is, I’m sorry, but I don’t really know you, so I’m not exactly comfortable… With that…” The blond finally answered as she rubbed her one elbow awkwardly. This answer caused Levy to fold her arms and aim a disappointed glare at the blond, for turning him down, even though she knew it had everything to do with her feelings for Natsu. She elbowed Lucy again, making the blond yelp and glance over at her annoyed friend.

“What’re you doing?” Levy whispered with a hand in front of her mouth and a crossed look towards Lucy. “You should say yes!”
“What? But I don’t even…” Lucy began.

“So?!” Levy snapped, cutting her off. “What happened to what we talked about earlier? The, ‘how you never put yourself out there’ thing… Ya know, because of Natsu… And the ‘we should take a page from Cana’s book thing…?’ Remember?”

“Oh yea… that…” Lucy replied looking away sadly.

“Yea, that! He’s good looking and polite Lucy… Even after you yelled at him! What the hell are you thinking?!”

“Ah... damn…” Lucy began to say regrettably. Meanwhile the man was just standing there watching the two of them for a moment, as they quibbled back and forth to one another, under their breath. Hiding their words with their hands and whispers.

“Um, ladies?” He questioned hesitantly not wanting to interrupt. They both glanced up at him. Their arms shooting back down to their sides as if they had just remembered he was still there. “It’s quite alright.” He started to say. “But for what it’s worth, I am very sorry I caused you to drop your drink… I’ll just leave you be…” He started to turn away, that was when Levy pushed Lucy forward.

“Oh hey!” The blond gasped out, as she tripped forwards, practically running into him. Her arm went forward, her hand landing on his forearm for support. The man gently turned some, his hand touching Lucy’s shoulder in a half attempt to steady her shaky balance.

“Whoa!” He replied with a light laugh as Lucy’s body rose back up now at a normal standing position. “You alright?” He asked her, looking right into her eyes. Lucy glanced up, his shades had fallen down his nose some and Lucy could now make out the olive-green color of his irises’ as they bore into her. Their bodies were now also, very close and she could feel her face warming up again, as she realized just how gentle his expression was.

“Yea…” She began, finally letting go of him. “I’m fine.” She answered taking a step back, as she rubbed her elbow with her other hand and smiled awkwardly, “Just… embarrassed.”

“No need to be.” He replied, smiling brightly with his eyes closed. “After all I’m pretty sure I’m the klutz here.” Lucy paused, taking in his smile. He really was an attractive guy and he seemed to be very kind. It was hard for her to admit that to herself, but she definitely could feel his effects on her.

“Yea… Speaking of that… Are you by chance, still interested…? In you know… Making it up to me?” Lucy questioned shyly, her words hesitating. There was a pause as Lucy glanced down, waiting for his reply. He turned back to face her, his eyebrows going up in surprise.

“Of course!” He answered excitedly. “But first…” He held out a hand towards her suddenly.

“You brought up a good point before, when you said we don’t know each other… Soooo…” His other hand went up, sweeping the locks of his red hair. “Maybe we should get to know each other. My name is Loke and who might you be?” He asked smoothly

“Oh I see… Right!” Lucy replied lightly, taking his hand gently. “I’m Lucy.”

“Lucy…” He spoke her name softly his eyes going up, almost dreamily for a second before he looked back at her. “That’s a beautiful name for a beautiful person.” Loke stated once again, as he kissed her hand, making her laugh awkwardly. She slid her hand out of his grasp, as she hadn’t expected him to do that a second time, let alone the first.

“Uh… you don’t have to do that every time…” Loke looked at her and laughed modestly.
“I apologize Lucy, if it makes you uncomfortable.” He answered graciously, bowing his head slightly and closing his eyes.

“Oh no! It’s not that! I just... I guess I’m just not used to guys doing that, that’s all.” She replied embarrassed. Loke looked at her with amazed eyes, as if what she was saying was ludicrous.

“Well I can’t be sorry about that.” He stated seriously as he looked up. “A girl like you should be used to it. In fact, you should be showered in compliments on a daily basis! And besides…” He began, looking back at her with another charming smile. “Your embarrassment is too cute for me to stop now.” He finished making Lucy’s heart pulse again, as all words had escaped her brain.

Loke watched her for a moment, completely enjoying every second of what he was putting her through, before shifting his eyes onto Levy who was trying not to laugh at her best friend’s beet red face. He smiled at the smaller girl warmly and offered his hand to her as well.

“My name is Levy. No need for the formalities.” She answered brightly as Loke kissed her hand as well.

“I apologize ladies, it’s just my way.” He answered warmly as he let her hand go. “Especially when in such lovely company.” He added glancing at the two of them.

“Well that’s quite alright then. We could stand to hang around a gentleman once in a while!” Levy answered with a laugh as Lucy just mumbled under her breath, her face still red. Loke smiled at Levy brightly, before speaking,

“So how about we head to the bar now and I buy the both of you pretty ladies a drink?” At this, Levy held up the hand that was holding her drink, that was only about halfway gone still.

“Oh that’s okay Loke, I still have a lot of mine left. You two should go and I’ll just stay here.” At this Lucy’s head snapped up and she looked at Levy with large fearful eyes.

“Are you sure? I really don’t mind, after all who could complain about having two beautiful girls as guests?” Levy just laughed at him and shook her head.

“I’m sure. You and Lucy go….” Lucy suddenly grabbed Levy’s arm.

“You have to come!” She whispered, her face getting close, as if terrified. “I can’t do this alone Levy! Don’t leave me!” Levy’s thin eyebrows crossed over her brow as she ripped her arm out of Lucy’s grasp.
“Stop it Lucy! You can do this, you’ll be fine!” Lucy brought a hand up to her warm face.

“No… but what if I say something stupid! What if I bring up Natsu!” Levy glanced up at Loke, from over Lucy’s shoulder; he seemed to be looking down. Levy could tell that he was checking out the blonde’s butt, while she had her back towards him. She looked back into Lucy’s chocolate eyes seriously.

“I don’t think it will matter.” She stated bluntly. “He’s already clearly into you… Now just go…” She pushed Lucy some, making the blond step back away from her. “Just go with it, you’ll be fine!” Lucy paused and looked at Levy with large almost sad eyes.

“Will you be okay, though?” She asked her voice louder, not caring if Loke heard them now. “Even with… You know….” Levy let out a breath as she looked at her friend with an annoyed, arched brow.

“Of course I will be! Now just go! I’ll be right here, when you get back, I promise!” Levy said as Lucy began to turn away awkwardly. Loke brought an arm up and around the blonde’s shoulder. Making her body go stiff as she glanced up at him in shock, as they began to move through the crowd. He smiled down at her kindly; figuring if she didn’t like it, then she would just push him away.

“It’s okay, just trying to help.” He assured her as he helped her push through the crowd around them. Lucy swallowed nervously as she felt his fingers lightly touching her bare shoulder, her body was trembling with nerves. It’s okay… She told herself. I’m fine… I can do this… Her eyebrows lowered some as she tried to put on a brave face. I have to do this… For myself… It’s time… It’s time to move on. She thought as she made her path towards the bar in Loke’s safe grasp.

Gajeel was watching the crowd from his spot along the wall, when he noticed the blond girl that had been accompanying Levy, walking off towards the bar with a carrot top. Seeing them made his eyes dart around the room carefully, in search for any sign of Levy, but he couldn’t seem to spot the shorter girl anywhere. He lifted his body up and off of the wall he had been leaning on and unfolded his arms, letting them drop back down to his sides. He downed what was left of his drink and stared at the empty container in his hand. Eh… Maybe it’s time to head out… He thought to himself, until he noticed the shape of a body standing right before him. He glanced up to see Thibault’s ugly face, glaring at him with his usual large grin.

“You leavin’ buddy?” Thibault asked him sarcastically. Gajeel couldn’t help, but notice he was holding an empty glass in his hand and he seemed to be feeling it some.

“Get the hell outta my way!” Gajeel sneered. Thibault held up his hands defensively.

“Hey all right! All right now… No need to be so hostile. I’ll go, but first…” He neared Gajeel slowly, with a mischievous grin plastered over his face. “I couldn’t help, but notice you, were lookin’ at someone earlier…” At this, Gajeel’s eyes grew and his look intensified on Thibault tenfold. “Ah see…” Thibault said with a wink and a click of his tongue. “You can’t even hide it… That look says it all.” He taunted with a finger pointed at Gajeel like it was a gun.

Gajeel said nothing for a moment as he could feel his anger intensifying within him, to a degree he had yet to feel that night. It was taking everything in his will power to not knock the idiot out, as he clenched a shaky fist at his side. He better not… He better stay away from her… Or I’ll… He quite honestly didn’t even know; he wasn’t sure what his anger would drive him to do.

Thibault was noticing how even the mere mention of the girl he had seen Gajeel staring at earlier,
was affecting him and he couldn’t help, but get a small jolly out of it.

“Aw… what’s a matter? You mad bro?” He answered sarcastically. “Don’t see why ya should be… If you like her so much, then why don’t you just go find her on the dance floor? Pretty sure that’s where I saw her go…” He asked mockingly. Gajeel bit down. His mouth went open, showing his clenched teeth and prominent fangs as he closed his eyes “Hmm… Are you maybe… Not… interested anymore?” Thibault asked with a hand over his chin, as if he were pondering Gajeel’s silence. “Or maybe… she’s the one who isn’t interested? Am I right? That probably explains it…” Thibault added smugly, before shrugging. “Either way, she’s fair game then, right?” Gajeel opened his eyes and sent Thibault a look only best described as death.

“You better keep away from her, you fucking filth… Or I’ll-”

“You gonna hit me in front of all these people?” Thibault questioned, cutting Gajeel off. His face lighting up with an almost evil looking grin, with his large square teeth exposed. “I think you could do without having all of the attention, don’t you?” He added as he began to turn away. “Besides… I’ll take my chances after getting’ a look at that ass of hers…” He started to say as his body turned away from Gajeel.

It was these words that finally pushed Gajeel over the edge. He lost all control and reached out like a snake striking for the kill. His glass slipping from his grip and hitting the ground with a crash as his hand made contact with the back of Thbault’s shirt, but Thibault had been expecting him to attack. He had started to turn evasively, just as Gajeel had made his move and was able to twist out of Gajeel’s grip. His own glass falling from his hands as well and shattering in their struggle. His head turned back to send Gajeel and ugly, yet arrogant smile.

“Wow you actually tried, huh? Can’t believe yer that stupid!” But as he said this Gajeel was lunging towards him, making his face become scared as he realized he wasn’t yet out of danger. Thibault jumped forwards and headed towards the dance floor, hastily out of fear. Gajeel stood there for a brief moment, looking at all of the packed people, his mind lost in his angry thoughts. This is just fucking perfect… He thought as he realized he needed to force his way through them, but he didn’t let his annoyance stop him as he began to push his large body forwards.

Levy was standing among the dancers alone; her body swayed some to the music, but not too much, all due to the drink she was still holding. She eyed the glass in her hand oddly, questioning if she should even bother finishing it at this point. She was thrilled to have possibly found Lucy a guy, but now she was just all the lonelier herself. This night really hadn’t gotten any better, where she was concerned and she was starting to consider just throwing in the towel on their failed ‘girls night’ by just calling either Jet or Droy to come and pick her up. She figured it was about time she forgave them both anyways and she really didn’t like the idea of making Lucy and Cana leave, just because she was miserable.

A vision of herself, curled up in a blanket with her pajamas on and a book in her hands came to mind. The whole premise of the vision seeming much more inviting than trying to endure the rest of the night, on the loud packed dance floor. Yea… I think going home is the right move… I think that’s what I’m going to do. She thought as she pulled out her phone, it’s time I talk to those guys again anyways… I can’t stay mad at them forever… She thought, but just as she went to text Jet, she heard a yell among the loud music.

She glanced up in time to see a lanky looking man’s head above some of the crowd, as his body pushed through some people into her clearing. His beady eyes landed on her face as he stood before her, causing Levy to look at him with puzzlement, as she could clearly see the panic plastered all
over his features.

“Please lady!” His deep voice thundered out fearfully. “You’ve got to help me!” He cried out.

“Wait what?” Levy uttered out confused, but the man looked up towards the crowd and yelped. Then without warning he was quickly moving to behind Levy’s small frame, almost as if he was trying to hide from someone. Levy glanced up to where he had been looking completely bewildered, until she suddenly spotted Gajeel’s large body pushing towards them. Oh, no… She thought grimly, her face falling into a deep frown as he now stood before her.

Gajeel’s red eyes were narrowed with anger, his sights aimed on the man who was now cowering behind Levy’s small body. His face was graced with disgust, that Thibault should be anywhere near Levy, let alone in such close proximity.

“Thibault!” Gajeel’s voice growled out with his fangs exposed, ignoring Levy’s pointed glare up at him. Thibault just cowered before him now, acting like a complete an utter fool. Levy glanced over at him from over her shoulder and then back up at Gajeel. “You fuckin weasel! Enough games! You stay away from her!” Gajeel shouted.

“Gajeel?!” Levy hollered, making Gajeel finally look at her. “What the hell is going on here?!” She asked severely annoyed. Gajeel just pointed at the man behind her as if enraged.

“This idiot!” He stated. “He’s mine!” He barked, making Levy glance down at the cowering man just behind her. She couldn’t help, but feel a moment of déjà vu as she realized she was the only thing standing between Gajeel and another man’s life potentially, once again. But this time the circumstances were in her favor. For one thing, they were surrounded by people and not alone. Not only that, but she had the advantage of knowing Gajeel better now.

“Why?” She asked looking back up at him bravely. “What do you need him for?” Gajeel’s fist clenched tightly.

“Doesn’t matter!” He snapped back. “Just hand him over!” Levy’s eyes grew large at the response, as she looked him up and down. Gajeel looked very tense, something she wasn’t used to seeing. She also realized she hadn’t ever seen him appear so angry before. Every word he spouted was like an overly aggressive shout. He reminded her of a rabid, caged dog; with the way, he appeared to be struggling with his rage, trying to hold it all in and keep it contained.

“No.” She answered simply. Her voice contradicting his own with its calmness, only serving to upset him further.

“What?!” Gajeel exploded. Thibault on the other hand was grinning madly. Gajeel stomped his heavy boot before her and then moved his body in such a way, so that his large size hung over Levy in an attempt to intimidate her.

“Levy…” He growled breathlessly, trying his best to contain his anger. “Move outta the way…”

“No, I won’t do that this time, Gajeel…” She answered defiantly making him snap his head away from her. His body was shrinking back down. He let out an almost animal like growl of frustration, before turning back towards her with his arms up like he wanted to strangle her; his fingers were curled up almost like claws.

“You don’t understand! This isn’t like the other times!” Gajeel exclaimed, his tone urgent, but still angry. “This guy is BAD!” Gajeel pointed at Thibault. “Bad Levy!” He added, his fangs showing.

“Bad, like you are Gajeel?” She asked making his eyes widen. “You told me your work here was
done for tonight! That was obviously a lie, because here you are getting into trouble once again! Tell me why I should trust you?!” Levy replied, becoming equally upset now, as her heart pounded.

Gajeel was staring at her, with shock evident in his eyes. He was just starting to realize how bad this situation truly was. She didn’t believe him and there wasn’t anything he could do about it!

“Because I don’t want to see you hurt!” Gajeel raged back. “You don’t understand the situation Levy, but you need to listen to me!” He answered, but Levy had, had it with him. She had been harshly reminded of what Gajeel was capable of when she saw the scared man named Thibault’s face, and realized who it was he had been trying to run and hide from. It was all just too familiar.

A vision of the man named Bora appeared to her, his face bloodied and broken. His terrified voice moaning in pain about trying to ‘hide’ from someone. That someone being, Black Steel Gajeel… Followed by another terrified face, a much more recent memory of a man who had similarly been afraid for his life at the hands of Gajeel. Those nights she had so badly wanted to forget about, but could not, pulsed through her mind with renewed strength. She hadn’t been able to do anything to stop him with Bora.

Not again… She thought, as Levy glanced back up at Gajeel seriously, looking over his cold dark features. It was time for her to snap back to reality… No matter what she thought of him or how he acted towards her, it didn’t change the fact that Gajeel Redfox was nothing, but a thug.

“No…” She began, shaking her head, making Gajeel’s mouth fall open. “No!” She snapped, her voice stronger now as all her anger came flying forward. “I know what will happen if I let you take this man! And this time I’m not going to let that happen! I won’t swallow that guilt a second time!” She pointed at Gajeel accusingly. “And you! For once in your life why don’t you just be honest and leave Gajeel! Leave me alone, like you said you would!” She snapped, now moving her pointing finger out in the direction of the exit.

Gajeel looked at her with wide eyes after having to endure her outburst. She had made it clear she was done listening to him and that there wasn’t about to be any more debate on what she was going to do. Gajeel clenched his teeth so hard that he could hear them crunching in his ears. He suddenly felt very helpless and beyond angry at her stubbornness. There was brief pause, as he stared into her rage fueled hazel eyes.

“FINE!” He answered back, his voice rising to new heights. “But don’t you blame me if you get hurt!” He added, shouting at top range now. Then he brought his head down towards hers, his voice becoming quiet again. “But for the record, I have never lied to you!” He added, with a hard-piercing stare, before finally turning away from her.

Levy watched as he began to stalk away, practically knocking people down as he forcefully pushed his way through them. Her face was heated with anger as she watched him go, but something inside of her was making her stomach twist into tight nervous knots. The words he had said… She was actually questioning them, despite her anger. Had he really never lied to her?

It was true that there was a lot of stuff he didn’t tell her, but now that she actually had to think about it, she had never questioned anything he had told her. She hadn’t ever realized it before, but what he said may have very well of been true. She just didn’t know if he had ever lied to her before or not…

“I owe you a thank you!” Levy turned around at the voice. There stood the man Gajeel had referred to as Thibault, looking down at Levy with a large toothy grin. Levy found his happy face a bit creepy, but she smiled despite herself. It wasn’t like her to be rude. “He woulda had my hide if it wasn’t for you! How did you do that anyways?” Levy glanced down awkwardly, her face flushing slightly.
“Oh well… Let’s just say Gajeel and I have some brief history, that’s all…” She answered, looking back up at him. “Honestly… I don’t really want to talk about it.”

“That’s fine, I don’t blame you! I wouldn’t want to either!” He brought a hand up to shield his mouth. “That guy’s a real monster if ya know what I mean.” He said quietly.

“Yea…” Levy replied half-heartedly with a weak laugh, a pang of guilt coming from within her. “By the way, Thibault was it?” She asked looking back up at him.

“Yes mam.” He answered reaching out a hand. “And I was too scared to catch yer name. What was it again?” Thibault asked. Levy looked at his offered hand and then back up to his strange face, with its huge overbearing smile. *This guy is really creepy… Like in a whole different way than Gajeel*… She couldn’t help, but think as she looked him over. Gajeel was at least something to look at, but this guy seemed to have nothing going for him. *Now… now Levy. You shouldn’t judge people by their appearances… You know better than that. He could be friendly for all you know… If anything, you should at least be kind and not rude to him.* She slowly and hesitantly brought her hand to his, almost as if she wasn’t sure she should.

“Levy…” She answered, as he held her hand for a moment, his beady eyes looking over her white skin, before he finally let go.

“Well then Levy, how about ya let me buy you a drink, as a thank you for what you did?” He questioned enthusiastically. Levy paused for a moment; her stomach was still twisting uneasily as Gajeel’s words rang through her mind.

‘*This guy is BAD Levy!*’ ‘*But for the record, I have never lied to you!*’

She glanced back down at the drink in her hand; for some reason her gut was telling her to heed Gajeel’s warnings. She held up her hand with the half empty glass.

“That’s quite alright, because you see, I still have half a drink left.”

“Ah… C’mon why should that matter?” Thibault just shrugged and looked at her oddly, before replying. “Yer about due for another, aren’t you?” He asked. Levy arched a brow at his persistence; it wasn’t a good sign to her. She was suddenly feeling an instinctive need to get away from him.

“Actually…” She began to say. “I was planning on leaving originally and-”

“Oh really? That’s too bad… But I can walk you to your car.” He stated quickly, cutting her off almost as if we were too eager. Levy’s eyes grew some at this, her bad feeling was only intensifying now. She knew at this point it would be a mistake to go outside with him, alone. She looked at him oddly trying to decide what she could do. Her plan had been to go outside in the parking lot and call Jet, but now it didn’t seem like he was going to leave her be. She didn’t want him to know that she didn’t actually have a car there. She could head for the bar where Lucy, Loke and Cana were most likely, but then what? If she didn’t actually leave he’d probably just follow her there and hang around them. Maybe insist on buying her a drink still. And honestly, she wasn’t sure she’d even find them among the masses of people. Then another idea occurred to her.

“Yea… I’ll leave in just a bit, but first I need to head to the restroom.” She replied.

“Ah ok, I’ll be waitin’ for ya when you get out.” Levy laughed nervously and he chuckled back. She
couldn’t help, but notice how those black eyes of his, were scaling over her. His off-putting stares provoking chills from within her. The way he looked at her, almost made her miss Gajeel’s staring. She turned away from him with phone in hand.

“Okay! Be right back!” She replied as she quickly began to push her way through the people, towards where the bathroom was.

Luckily it wasn’t far; she busted through the door and immediately set her drink down on the sink’s counter followed by her nervous and shaking hands. She stared at her panting reflection in the mirror; she could feel her body quivering some in alarm. *I should have listened…This guy is a creepy thug who doesn’t plan on leaving me alone…* She thought. *I should have listened to Gajeel and then maybe I wouldn’t be in this mess!* She thought banging her fist on the counter in frustration.

*But you didn’t… and you can’t change that now…* Her thoughts reminded her in an attempt to calm herself. *Instead the more important thing to do, is to figure out how you’re going to get yourself out of it…* She let out a shaky breath she had been keeping. *Now just calm down and think Levy…* She thought trying to regain her composure as she glanced down at her phone, the wheels in her brain beginning to turn.

*I’ll just call Jet now, while I’m in here… Then I’ll just have him text me when he arrives. In the meantime, I can stay in the bathroom while I wait for him… That way I won’t have to be that creep’s company anymore… Then when Jet does finally get here, I’ll just book it towards the door… There won’t be anything he can do with all of these people here…* She glanced back up at her reflection in the mirror, her complexion looked pale under the cheap lighting.

Then her thoughts were interrupted when she heard a toilet flush. One of the stall doors opened, the noises succeeding in making her nervous body jump. She had thought she was alone in the small bathroom. The girl who stepped out had pink hair with sweeping bangs and poufy curls at the ends. Her eyes were large and almost timid looking, as she glanced up at Levy for a moment.

“I’m really sorry if I scared you miss!” She spoke in a soft weak voice. Levy just smiled at her weakly in return, she couldn’t believe how jumpy she was.

“It’s okay! Really… It wasn’t your fault. Just thought I was in here alone, is all…” Levy answered making the girl nod in understanding. The girl approached the sink and washed her hands quickly, before walking out without another word to Levy.

“Yea…” Levy spoke out breathlessly to nobody now. Looking back down at her phone she started to search for Jet’s phone number. “That sounds good.”

Meanwhile Thibault was waiting just outside the door of the women’s restroom, unbeknownst to Levy. He watched the pink haired girl Levy had just seen, open the door and step out. He quickly approached her, before she could walk away.

“Hey!”

“What?! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” The girl yelled out in alarm, closing her eyes with fist clenched, looking like she might cry. Thibault tilted his head at her and hesitated for a moment out of shock, from the girl’s sudden fear.

“Oh… um sorry… Didn’t mean ta scare ya… Was just wondering if you saw anyone else in there? I’m looking for my girlfriend. Can’t find her anywhere and I’m just wondering if she went in the bathroom…” He asked nonchalantly.
“Oh! I’m sorry!” The pink haired girl bowed her head in apology before rising back up. “The only person I saw in there was a small girl, with blue hair…” She responded.

“Yup, that’s her, thanks a million!” He cheered making the pink haired girl smile and bow her head quickly again.

“Happy to be of service sir…” She replied weakly, before finally turning away from him to walk off. Thibault made sure to watch her leave, taking enjoyment out of the view that her short, tight dress provided, before his beady eyes darted around the room to see if anyone else was paying him any attention. Then he cautiously opened the door to the girl’s restroom as quietly as he could. His thin body slid its way inside, before he then leaned his back up against the closed door gently. He glanced over and saw Levy with her back towards him. She was looking at her phone; he could see her frustrated face in the mirror.

“Damn reception!” She snapped out loud, to nobody.

“Yea… It’s a real bitch.” Thibault smirked before speaking, his voice almost mocking.

Levy’s eyes grew as large as saucers, as she felt her heart jump up, jamming into her throat out of pure fear. Her small form whipped around to see his body there in front of the door, blocking her only way out. He was smiling at her with those large square teeth, his face reminding her of a demented clown. Levy instinctively took a step back, with her arms out at her sides, one hand holding her phone.

“That was a nice attempt to try and get away from me…” He spoke now, his tone and words finally revealing his true intentions. “No drink, good excuses… Yer a lot smarter than most of the girls I go after. I’ll give ya that one…” He started to say as he stepped towards her. “It’s gonna make me enjoy this even more I think…” He stated, opening his long gorilla like arms, to block her from going anywhere. Their length made it impossible for her to even fathom getting past him. “Smart, pretty and the added bonus of you once being Gajeel’s girl... Couldn’t get any better if I dreamed it up…” He added, his voice so full of glee, that it made Levy sick to her stomach. Then he let out his barbaric chuckle as he took another step closer.

Levy’s body was now shaking from head to toe, as she realized just how much trouble she was really in. She was slowly backing away from him, but the bathroom was already so tiny that she was soon to be backed, into a corner. *What can I do?!* She thought. Her first instinct was to scream for help.

“HELP! Someone! PLEASE!” She cried out as tears began to gather in her large eyes, just as her back collided with the wall, with nowhere more for her to go. Thibault cackled at her attempts to yell for help and narrowed his eyes on her.

“You can shout and scream all you want! That’s not gonna save you! That music is way too loud for anyone to hear you in here! In fact, I recommend you scream some more! It might make things more fun!” He shouted back as Levy’s wide eyes stared at his nearing form, in disbelief. His long arms still keeping her trapped and cornered. Never in her life, had she ever felt as helpless as she did right now. Her shaky hands brought her phone up quickly, in a last-ditch effort to try and call someone for help.

“Oh whatcha tryin’ to do there?!” He questioned, his grin fading as his hand went reaching for hers. Levy took that moment to duck down, avoiding his flying arm and then she pushed off of the wall, propelling her small body forwards, in an attempt to try and run underneath his. She just brushed past him, her legs making a mad dash for the door. Just as she thought she had managed to maybe get away from him, something grabbed her and jerked her small form backwards with such force that her
phone went flying out of her hands and across the room. She watched it slide across the bathroom tiles until it thudded into the opposite wall. Thibault had wrapped his large hand around her forearm as he jerked her back a second time.

“NO ya don’t!” He shouted pulling her into his body. She pushed and pulled against him with all of her might. Her free arm reaching out in an attempt to grab at anything that might help her get away, but there was nothing, but empty air between her fingers now. Her back was slammed up against his chest, as his other arm went snaking around her waist. Her head landing just under his long chin. He held her one arm back, bending it out and around his frame painfully, as his other arm locked her in place against him. Levy closed her eyes tightly as tears began pooling in her eyes; her mouth was letting out small whimpers as he continued to keep pressure on her thin arm, bending it painfully. Her back end was flushed up against his front and her whole body was trembling, as she felt the shape of his arousal digging into her lower back. Her breaths were labored and full of panic, as her heart continued to pulse through her entire being.

“Pleassee…” She begged. “I won’t tell anyone if you just let me go…” She tried, her words breathless and shaky.

“Now, now…” He spoke mockingly as if trying to be soothing. She felt him pushing on her arm so hard, that she felt like her elbow might snap. Her mouth opened, as a cry of pain flew from her lungs. “We’re already here… Can’t stop now…” He spoke, before suddenly letting her go and pushing her small frame into the nearest door of a bathroom stall, so hard that she crashed into it and fell onto the ground. Her back hit the stall wall besides the toilet, she quickly struggled in an attempt to get up and get away, but it was too hard, because of the lack of room she had. Thibault was hovering above her now inside the stall; he looked down at her with his deranged smile, bringing a finger to his lips. “Shh…” He said as he latched the stall door with both of them inside. Levy looked to him with wide eyes, then to the floor. She got down further and reached at the wall under the stalls in one last attempt to try and crawl away underneath it, but Thibault was yanking her up as he brought himself down. His knees were now pinning her legs down, making Levy cry out from his weight. His arms and hands were attempting to grab her arms, but she was clawing and swinging at him as much as she could. Trying to fight him off with all of her strength. She could see his face becoming angry and then finally he got a good hold of her wrist.

He jerked her upper body up enough, so that her head was up and off of the ground. Then he quickly jammed it into the porcelain bowl of the toilet, so hard that the skin on the side of Levy’s upper forehead split open. Blood came leaking out from the wound and the small girl’s eyes that had been full of fight, were now full of haze, her eyelids falling closed briefly.

Levy blinked, her vision had blurred over into a swirl of dark colors and shapes. She felt an odd numbness wash over her and for a moment it was almost as if her body was rebooting. The first sensation that came to her was that of the cold hard floor, against her back. The next feeling, she was able to recognize was something heavy sitting over top of her legs, keeping her stiff body pinned down. She slowly tried to lift her head, which now felt like it had tripled in weight, to no avail. Instead it just fell limply as her hazel eyes glanced around lazily. She couldn’t make sense of where she was or what was happening at that moment. Noise had all, but disappeared, her vision wouldn’t fully render and sensations seemed to be coming to her slowly, one at a time as she began to feel someone’s hands over her. She closed her eyes for a moment, straining to remember whose they were; she couldn’t think properly her mind was still dizzy and disoriented from the blow. Then she could feel a warm liquid dripping down the side of her face… That was when she knew; she knew she was in a bad spot.
Now that she could at least remember that much, she attempted to try to move under the heavy body’s weight, but she just couldn’t. Her mouth opened as she tried to make words... It was so... Difficult though, like everything she seemed to try. Her body and mind felt so tired now, but something was calling fourth from deep within her, to not give up and continue to fight. Then that was when Levy finally heard sound again. It was her own voice she could hear as she almost subconsciously spoke out in protest.

“Noooo...” She moaned out groggily, as she tried to lift her head up again.

“Still awake?” She thought she could hear a familiar voice saying. “That’s fine, I prefer that!” It was hard to make out all of the words in her dizzy and confused state, but she knew she didn’t like them. Then she could hear something tearing. She didn’t know it at the time, but it was her jacket. Thibault was ripping it off of her. The next thing she felt were his cold fingers against her skin, making her cringe. She slowly tried to bring an arm up, to push whoever it was on top of her away, but she couldn’t seem to move right. It was almost as if her head just couldn’t send the right signals yet. Then another noise sounded off, making Levy’s exhausted head fall back to the floor and shift over. Her eyes were looking underneath the bathroom stalls in the direction of the bathroom door, that she could see the bottom of. That was when she spotted the bottom of boots coming in through, as it opened.

Gotta... Call for help... Her mind finally spoke, her first real coherent thought since hitting her head. Her mouth opened, but words wouldn’t seem to fly from her throat. She closed her eyes tightly, out of frustration. She could feel large vibrations through the floor and the sound of steps getting louder. Then another sound resounded in her ears. She didn’t know it at the time, but what she was hearing was a knock on the door of the stall they were in.

Thibault shifted his head up quickly out of annoyance.

“Occupied! Can’t ya see we’re busy!” He shouted to whomever was knocking with great irritation. He had kind of figured most women would just assume they were a loose couple, just having a good time. He stopped all movement and listened carefully. His eyes on the bare skin of Levy’s stomach and underwear as he had started to lift up her dress. She was lying on her back before him, on the bathroom floor, her head between the toilet and stall wall, half underneath it. Her eyes were still open, but she was clearly still out of it, as they looked glazed over. The gash on her head was leaving a line of blood down the side of her face, some of it, in her hair.

Thibault moved his head up, listening to the person he could hear just behind the door, he started to hear steps. He let out a small breath of relief, as he realized they must have been walking away.

A large crash sounded off, Levy felt the heavy person on her legs, weight shift forward over her body, before finally being lifted off altogether. There was a bright light that blinded her hazy eyes, as the stall door had opened. She began to hear angry familiar yells, followed by anguished cries. Then a large shadowy person came before her, shielding her eyes from the bright, blinding lights of the bathroom. She blinked briefly in an attempt to clear her vision. The outline of the person looked so familiar, she wanted so badly to make out who it was, but it was so hard.
“Levy?!” A heavy voice cried out in alarm. Levy blinked again, trying to lift her head up. She knew that voice.

“Gajeel…” She moaned out weakly. She felt a large hand gently touch the side of her face.

“God damn it!” He cursed. “I shouldn’t have left you…” At this Levy, could feel herself suddenly smiling, as she felt his other hand carefully lifting her head and back, up and off of the floor.

“I made you leave…” She replied. “It’s my fault this happened…” She uttered out, as all of the memories were returning.

“Shut up… Idiot…” He cursed lowly, “C’mon we need ta get outta here… Can you stand?” He asked. Levy could now make out his face for the most part. His eyes looked wide and full of concern. She glanced down at herself. She was sitting up now, her dress had been moved up some, exposing more of her lower half than she was comfortable with. Her shaky hands gripped at the fabric of her skirt and she slowly pulled it back down, before looking back at Gajeel who was kneeling down beside her. His head was so close to hers. Her eyes still felt lazy, but she could feel her strength returning.

“Yea…. I think so.” She answered, before suddenly feeling a wave of pain in her head. “Ahh…..” She let out a small cry of agony. “What the hell…” She moaned in a raspy voice, as she brought a hand up to the spot where Thibault had slammed her head, before letting it fall forwards some, so that her forehead was now resting against Gajeel’s shoulder, burying her face, as the pain rocked through her.

“Yea…. Looks like you got clocked pretty good there, shrimp… You’re even bleeding… So you might still feel disoriented for a couple of minutes.” Gajeel stated, his arm almost wanting to go around her in a half embrace, but he kept his hand hovering over her. Not wanting to make contact, even though he wanted nothing more than to hold her, now that she was safe.

He couldn’t believe he had found her in this state, bloodied and beaten up on the floor. His heart was racing from the fear of what he had thought he might find, but now he was just thanking the holy gods he had gotten there in time.

Originally after walking away from her, Gajeel had thought about leaving, but he just couldn’t bring himself to do it, out of fear of something like this maybe happening. His gut had been screaming about Thibault from the very start and he wasn’t surprised to learn that all of his instincts about the man had been dead on, but it didn’t mean he was happy about it. If anything, he was furious with himself for walking away… Leaving her in danger, when he had known better. Hell, Thibault probably wouldn’t have even targeted Levy if it weren’t for Gajeel’s interest in her to begin with. So as far as Gajeel was concerned her getting hurt, was his own fault in multiple ways. He could have prevented the whole thing from happening if he had just stayed.

“It is all my fault…” He breathed out.

“What was that…?” She asked. Her voice slightly muffled as she slowly raised her head up and off of him, looking up into his eyes. He looked back and shook his head.

“Nothing shrimp… Now come on… We need to get out of here, before Thibault recovers. I knocked him down, but not hard enough.” Gajeel urged, his hands now gently resting over Levy’s waistline. “C’mon I’ll help ya stand.”

“Okay…” Levy uttered out, as the two of them slowly began to stand, with her leaning on Gajeel for support. Once they were up, Gajeel wrapped one arm around her waist and Levy did the same to
him so that she could lean on him as she still got her bearings together.

The room felt like it was spinning slowly to Levy, but with Gajeel’s help, they slowly started to move forwards and out of the stall carefully. Just outside of it, Thibault was sitting on ground, against the bathroom wall, slowly rubbing his jaw where Gajeel had clearly punched him. He saw them and carefully began to get up as well.

“Gajeel…!” He shouted at them. Gajeel glanced up at him with wide eyes, before propelling him and Levy’s bodies forward towards the door.

“C’mon shrimp! Move!” He spoke pushing the bathroom door open just as Thibault was on his feet. The two of them were now back out and into the club, with Thibault not far behind them. They began to move as quickly as they could among the crowd of people and neon lights towards the exit. Levy tried to keep her head low so that people wouldn’t notice her bleeding; luckily Gajeel’s body was big enough to cover her for the most part. Levy could feel all of her senses starting to fall back into place, with each step they made towards the door; she once again was feeling fully coherent as they finally pushed their way through the last of the crowds. Gajeel kicked open the door and then Levy finally let him go, as she felt the cool air hit her face. She could now walk freely as they headed into the parking lot. Her dizziness basically gone; she glanced over to Gajeel with wide eyes.

“Now what?” She questioned hastily. Not believing that all of this was happening, but not having the time to dwell on it.

“You just get out of here!” He urged. “I’ll take care of Thibault.”

“You mean to tell me, that he is still after us?” Levy questioned in astonishment.

“We lost him for the moment, but he’s too much of a stubborn fool to let this go. He should be out here any minute, so just go!” Gajeel ordered.

“Gajeel I can’t! I don’t have a car here! And m y phone is inside!”

“What?!” Gajeel cried out in disbelief, just as Thibault’s dark form came barging through the club’s doors. His body was nothing more than a silhouette in the night with the lights of the club behind him. Gajeel turned towards Levy with wide eyes,

“Get out of sight Levy!” He cried out, pointing to a nearby car that she could hide behind. Levy quickly obeyed, ducking down behind a Challenger’s car hood. Her eyes peeking over, so she could watch as Thibault’s angry lanky form approach Gajeel’s much larger, taller one.

She could see their two dark forms against the lights of the club, as they stood about eight feet apart from each other, in the deserted parking lot. The ground was wet as if it had rained, making it look black and reflective. The night was relatively warm for fall, with a slight cool breeze. The only noise was the sound of leaves crinkling and lifting in the distance with each gust.

“Gajeel! Quit running!” Thibault cried out as he staggered before Gajeel with a finger pointing. “Cause I’m gonna make you pay for messing up my face!” He added with a pant as he took a labored breath.

“Fuck you Thibault! Is that all you care about?! Yer lucky I didn’t fucking kill you for what I caught you doin! Yer a sick bastard!” Gajeel spat back. His arms going out and his fists tightening at his sides, his muscles were clenching with anger.
“Oh is that right Gajeel?! I’m sick? Are you gonna give me a lecture about what I do?! What about you Black Steel!! What makes you think, yer any better than me?! Well, guess what, yer not! If anything, yer worse! You’ve made a name for yourself doing all sorts of dirty deeds for that snake Jose! Actin’ all high and mighty, just cause he can pretend that everything he does is legal, all because he’s got everyone in his back pocket! HA! Don’t make me laugh!” Thibault pointed at Gajeel. His movements were spastic, putting Gajeel on the defense as though he might attack at any second.

Levy was watching them now, her brow lowering over her eyes at what Thibault was saying. She had already come to these conclusions about the man Gajeel worked for, but that didn’t mean actually hearing it straight from the sources mouth, made it any less daunting. No matter what though, she knew who she would be rooting for. Gajeel had actually saved her this time, quite literally, regardless of who he was or what he did.

“No! If anything, you’re the sick ones! Justifying everything you do with money!”

“Fuck you Thibault! I don’t make a hobby of attacking and raping women!” Gajeel shouted back, his stance strong.

“Oh yea… Yer gonna tell me you didn’t want the same thing, tonight?!” Thibault questioned. Gajeel just shook his head in disgust. “I’m just a man trying to fulfill his inner needs. I’m not any different than you are!” Thibualt added defiantly clenching a fist.

“NO! Yer nothing, but a dead man now!” Gajeel barked back. “You should have never made an enemy out of me, Thibault…” Gajeel growled. His body was lowering as if he was about to leap in for the attack, almost resembling a cat getting in the ready position to pounce.

“Not if I kill you first!” Thibault’s voice boomed out, as he suddenly lunged towards Gajeel, not waiting for him to make the first move.

Gajeel gritted his teeth and dodged the first punch, as Thibault came at him with a heavy right and then smoothly followed up with another quick jab to the left. Luckily Gajeel had been ready for it and was able to block the left fist with his arm, but just as he did that, Thibault was bringing up his leg to kick him in the ribcage. Gajeel stepped back to evade it, but the lack of footing made him misjudge the ridiculous length of Thibault’s long arms, as an uppercut was thrown his way.

Levy was slamming her eyes shut, as Gajeel couldn’t regain his footing enough to bend back far enough. Ultimately Thibault’s fist came flying up, making contact with Gajeel’s jaw, hard. Gajeel’s head went up and back from the blow, but his large frame didn’t fall back any further. Instead his feet stayed firmly planted and his head slowly came back down, towards Thibault, with an evil smirk exposing his now bloody fangs. Levy’s eyes were now open wide, as she watched him in disbelief. She couldn’t believe she had just witnessed Gajeel take a blow like that and still be on his feet. The sound of the impact had even made a cringe worthy popping noise.

“Is that all you got….?” Gajeel questioned, his voice sounding as if he were laughing. Thibault stared at him with wide, disbelieving eyes.

“How-how!? How can you speak after taking a hit like that?!” Thibault stuttered out, earning one of Gajeel’s signature laughs.

“Gi hi! That’s easy…” He spoke as he spat some blood from his mouth down onto the concrete. Then without warning Gajeel’s arm was reaching out grabbing Thibault’s still up and ready fist. Holding the lanky man’s body in place as his other arm reeled back at his side, ready to strike. “Because yer weak!” He shouted confidently as his fist came flying forwards into Thibault’s
stomach, so hard that the man stumbled back several steps once Gajeel let him go. His arms wrapped around his midsection in pain as he coughed out some spit. Levy couldn’t help, but feel her heart leap as she watched Thibault gasp in agony from Gajeel’s superior blows.

“Aw did that hurt…?” Gajeel questioned mockingly as he folded his arms over his chest. Levy was watching the two of them, witnessing the whole spectacle from her spot behind the car… Get him Gajeel…. She was thinking when she noticed Thibault make an odd movement, as he still stood there, hunched over.

Wait…. What is he… what is he doing? She questioned, as she noticed he seemed to be holding something in his hands. He didn’t rise up from his hunched over position, because he was trying to hide whatever it was, from Gajeel’s eyes. Her eyes went wide with realization and that was when she suddenly stood up.

“Gajeel! Watch out!” She screamed, earning Gajeel’s attention for a brief second, “He’s holding a weapon!” She cried out, but it seemed like her warning was already too late as Thibault had already started flying forwards. His body still hunched over, a knife in his hand. Gajeel glanced forward with wide eyes, just as Thibault’s body came ramming into him. His knife going forward and plunging through Gajeel’s clothing and embedding into his flesh, with a grunt and one eye wincing from the slicing pain.

“GAJEEL!” Levy’s shrill screamed echoed out into the night, between tears.

Chapter End Notes

See that boy just standing over there
He stopped me today said he liked my hair. Ooh
He asked me where you going tonight (err)
And I said I’m with my girls (yeah A was on the run)
To tell you the truth he was just a lil bit fresh
He said he liked the way I put my lipstick on
He said how many sugars do you like in your tea? (umm)
But I stopped listening, he got me daydreaming
Oh my gosh
He’s making eyes at me and I don’t mind at all
Oh my gosh
He’s making my imagination run w-wild

Listen to this yea
There I was with a drink in my hand
No cares in the world didn’t have a plan
I turned around and I caught his eye
He made me lose my concentration

Did you get his number? No
Did you get his name? ummm
What score would you give him on a scale of 1 to 10?
I didn’t get his number (I didn’t get his number)
I don’t know his name.
But I think he’s hot y’no and I think he is a 10
Oh my gosh He’s making eyes at me and I don’t mind at all
Oh my gosh He’s making my imagination run w-wild
(no no no no no no)
Oh my gosh He’s making eyes at me and I don’t mind at all
Oh my gosh He’s making my imagination run w-wild
(no no no no no no)

Ooh I’m feeling you girl
From your head to your feet
Cause you look so good I can barely speak
Give me ur digits a can phone u
Got all things I want to tell you
Oh my gosh I think I love you

Oh my gosh
He’s making eyes at me and I don’t mind at all
Oh my gosh
He’s making my imagination run w-wild
(no no no no no no)

Oh my gosh
Oh my gosh

“Oh My Gosh” By Basement Jaxx - This song was chosen for Lucy and Loke
Lucy decides to give her friend the benefit of doubt as Levy had wanted, not realizing she is actually leaving her in serious danger. Gajeel takes out his rage on Thibault, despite Levy’s pleas and she witnesses it. Levy then convinces him to allow her to help. Lucy ends up pretty drunk and the cops show up at the club. Levy and Gajeel have a moment, that they both don’t know to do about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Monster

Chapter 5: Claws

Lucy sat there staring at the half full drink before her, on the bar top. Her eyes were following the movement of a drop of water, as it made its path down the side of her ice filled glass. There was a blissful smile on her lips. Her cheeks were a warm shade of pink, as she allowed herself to get lost in the moment. All of the noise from the music and surrounding conversations were fading away, alongside all of her stresses and worries. And for the first time in forever Lucy felt truly at ease, to the point where nothing could even touch her and she was enjoying every second of it. She had never imagined that it was possible for her to feel so relaxed at a place like this. The alcohol was slowly taking affect, without her even realizing it.

“Now that’s a pretty smile if I’ve ever seen one.” She heard a smooth voice comment beside her, breaking through her tranquil vibe and bringing her back to reality. Lucy’s head turned to glance at the man sitting beside her. He was leaning on the bar, his head resting in one hand as he watched her with a sly smile. His red hair was sweeping over his forehead and his eye’s lighting up through his specs once she made eye contact with him. His gaze was so enticing that Lucy immediately glanced back down, her color deepening. Loke closed his eyes in delight as he noticed her embarrassment.

“Sorry to embarrass you again, but you should smile like that, all of the time.” He offered lightly.

“I’m having a good time.” She replied cheerfully, but in a soft voice as she chanced a look back up at Loke who was still smiling at her.

“You weren’t expecting to huh?” He asked, Lucy’s eyes opened up some at his words in suspense, as she didn’t mean to be rude.

“No-no it’s nothing like that. I-just!” She stammered but was cut off by Loke’s laughter.

“It’s okay.” He responded, pushing his shades up with a hand, to steady them over the bridge of his
nose, before looking back at her. “Don’t take this wrong way, but you don’t strike me as the type of
girl to come to these kinds of places.” He spoke politely. Lucy blinked at him for a moment,
surprised that he had guessed her right.

“You’re right, I’m not.” She answered before lifting a brow at him, “But how did you know that?!?”
Lucy began to look over herself as if alarmed, as she continued. “Is there something noticeable about
me that screams it or something-?! Oh, great, I look like a total nerd, don’t I?!” Lucy was once again
cut off by Loke’s chuckle as he watched her from his seat at the adjacent barstool. The rosy color of
her cheeks began to spread and deepen as she watched him with mouth agape, her eyebrows
crossing over her brow in frustration. “Hey!” Her hands, balled up into tight fists and flew down at
her sides stiffly. “Are you laughing at me?!” She exclaimed, clearly flustered.

“No, it’s not that-” Loke choked out between, breaths, “I’m sorry it’s-” He managed to get out, but
his laughing hadn’t ceased just yet. Lucy just folded her arms over her chest and stuck her chin up at
him. She closed her eyes, before looking away in mock insult.

“Oh really? Then what may I ask, is so funny?!” She asked, sounding rather miffed by his reactions
towards her. Loke’s laughing was just dying down as he brought a finger up towards his eye to wipe
at a straying tear from underneath his sunglasses. Lucy chanced another glance up at him despite
herself; he was closing one eye as he shot her another very contagious smile.

“I’m sorry about that!” He began lightly. “It was just your face!” He added with a hand up towards
his mouth, in an attempt to keep one last brief chuckle from sliding out. “Didn’t mean to be rude. It
just caught me off guard, that’s all. You looked so worried!” He closed his eyes happily, before
opening them and looking up at her sincerely. “Trust me, there’s nothing wrong with the way you
look.” He quickly scanned over her whole body. “In fact, you look like you fit right in with this
crowd, in that dress and I’m not just saying that!” At this rate Lucy’s face was never going to go
back to its normal color.

“Well okay… Then how could you tell?” She asked rather shyly, still flustered by his words.

“Simple, I’ve never seen you here before.” He added with a wink. “I definitely would have
remembered you, if I had.” Lucy looked away from him, her hand grabbing at her glass and
bringing it up to her lips, but not sipping it just yet.

“Well… What if I told you, I’m from out of town?” Lucy asked, before finally taking a brief drink.

“I’d say that it’s not likely.” Loke answered shaking his head. Lucy paused looking at him with a
confused expression, before slamming her glass back down on the bar.

“And why do you say that?!” She asked demandingly. “I could be from anywhere for all you know!
How would you?!” At this Loke gave her a rather cheeky smile as he suddenly pointed at Lucy’s
tiny pink purse. The lengthily strap of it, was hanging on the back of her barstool.

“There’s a lanyard hanging out of your purse that says differently. If anything, it implies that you go
to Mavis University. Which suggest that you probably live here in Magnolia.”

“Ha! Shows how much you know, smart guy!” Lucy snapped with a finger pointing at him.
“Because that’s not even mine! They’re my classmates’ keys, so that proves nothing.” She replied
coyly, her head leaning in as she held her drink in one hand again. Loke leaned back away from her,
still smiling.

“You’re right it doesn’t, but you just told me otherwise.”
“Say what?” Lucy questioned him with narrowed eyes. The glass was hovering just below her lips.

“Classmate’s keys you say?” He repeated. “Meaning you go to school together?” Loke asked, his tone leaning, just as his body was towards her. Lucy paused for a moment taking in what he had just said, realizing where she had slipped up. She glanced down at the drink she was holding up by her chin, suddenly feeling very stupid.

“Alright, so maybe I’m a little more tipsy than I thought...” She replied, before glancing back up at him, with eyes still narrowed. “You win this round sir...” She spoke before sipping her drink, her eyes never leaving him. “But don’t get used to it.” She said as she moved her glass back to the table. “I may be blond, but I am also very clever... A lot more so, than people give me credit for. I won’t mess up twice.” She replied.

“So I take it, you’re enjoying this guessing game, then?” Loke asked.

“I didn’t say that.” She answered smiling, her eyes going closed and her head angling up slowly as if disinterested in him. Loke could see that she was clearly lying, in an attempt to toy with him playfully, and he sure as hell didn’t mind. He watched her for a moment, enjoying the view as Lucy’s sights were elsewhere. His eyes played over the delicate features of her heart shaped face and the way her golden hair flowed around it, in a nice symmetrical frame, before traveling down the length of her neck, to the large swell of her cleavage and down even further to the narrow line of her waist. She really was quite the specimen; he hadn’t been exaggerating in his compliments towards her and he knew one way or another, he needed to get her to like him, now that he had found such a girl.

“Well don’t you two look cozy!” Came a loud voice, interrupting Loke’s thoughts. Lucy’s eyes opened, just as she felt an arm slide behind her back and a hand slap down onto her shoulder. It was Cana who was suddenly pulling her into a semi hug with one arm, as she held a large mug in the other. She had a wide grin over her face, that exposed all of her teeth; her eyes were closed in excitement, after having found Lucy with a guest.

“Cana!” Lucy exclaimed in shock. “You’re here! Where have you been?!” Cana opened her eyes and shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh ya know... Here, there, everywhere.” She replied quickly, her tone full of disinterest. “Whatever. Hey, who’s this?!” She asked motioning towards Loke with her mug, quickly changing the subject.

“Oh... that’s Loke.” Lucy answered, watching Cana unsuspectingly.

“Nice to meet you!” Loke offered a hand out towards Cana as he said this to her. Cana unwrapped her arm from around the blonde’s shoulders and gave it over to Loke willingly, who immediately moved his head down to kiss it, just as he had with Levy and Lucy earlier. Lucy watched as Cana’s dark violet eyes scaled over Loke up and down. She could feel a slight pang of worry irrupting from her heart, at the brunette’s obvious action, almost as if she was feeling jealous... But that can’t be it... Was her only thought, I hardly know him. How would I be jealous already?

“Wow, hello!” Cana replied in awe, as she took her hand back. She turned her head towards Lucy, so that Loke couldn’t see or hear her. “Well now, isn’t he something?” She whispered to the blond slyly, before turning back to face Loke with a bright smile. “Nice to meet you Loke! I’m Cana and I can see you already met my friend, Lucy!” Cana spoke as she elbowed Lucy slightly, causing the blond to glare up at her, as if annoyed. “We’re just enjoying a girl’s night out together!” She added pulling Lucy in for another hug with her one arm, as she sent Loke a wink, accompanied by her bright smile, before taking another swig from her mug. “So... What are you two up to?” The
brunette questioned, her tone coming out almost too innocently. Her violet eyes were traveling from Loke’s face, back to Lucy’s, where they were met with the blonde’s annoyed stare.

“Girls night, huh?” Lucy scoffed. “Levy and I have hardly seen you since the night started.” Lucy added, her tone dry. There was a brief pause as Lucy and Cana looked at one another, when Lucy’s eyes widened in realization. “Oh my god, Levy!” Lucy exclaimed as she just remembered their third comrade. “I was having such a good time, that I forgot all about her!” She started scrambling for her bag, pulling out her phone.

“Oh right, you did tell her we were going to come back.” Loke chimed in, as Lucy started dialing Levy’s number. Cana watched the both of them with a puzzled face as Lucy’s phone began to ring Levy’s number.

“Wait, you mean you two don’t know?” The brunette asked. Lucy glanced over at Cana, her eyebrows pushing together as she brought the phone up to her ear.

“Know what?” She questioned her friend.

“Levy left.” Cana stated bluntly.

“What!” Lucy exclaimed, Loke’s eyes also widened in surprise after hearing this news.

“Wait a minute, are you sure?” He asked Cana. Cana leaned back, shifting her weight so that she could look at both of their questioning faces, as Lucy’s phone continued to ring Levy’s.

“Yea, I’m positive! I saw her leaving with someone about twenty minutes ago actually.” Lucy was staring at Cana in disbelief. Her mouth hanging open as she could still hear the sound of Levy’s phone ringing in her ear.

“Wow I can’t believe it! She actually went and did it… I wonder who it was she left with then…” Lucy uttered out in amazement as Cana flashed her a knowing smirk.

“Well… I don’t exactly know for myself, but don’t be expecting her to answer that phone anytime soon, because from what I hear, she’s in good hands.”

“Oh… yea?” Lucy questioned.

“Yep!” Cana answered, taking another drink from her mug. “Our girl Levy is in for a fun night!” Just as the words left the brunette’s mouth, Levy’s voice came over Lucy’s phone, in the form of her voicemail message.

Elsewhere in the deserted bathroom of the club was a discarded phone, vibrating and ringing on deaf ears against the tiles of the bathroom floor. After a few minutes, it finally stopped vibrating and instead rang out a single beeping noise to indicate that it was going to voicemail.

“Hi! You have reached Levy McGarden’s phone! Sorry I can’t talk right now, but if you leave me your name and number, I promise to return your call as soon as possible! Thanks, and have a great day!” Came Levy’s voice from over the lonely phone on the floor, before it beeped a second time.

“Um… Levy? It’s Lucy, sorry I forgot you! I know you’re probably busy right now… At least, that is what Cana is telling me…. Anyways… Could you just make sure you get back to me at some point? You know how I worry about you and all… Be safe, love you!” Came Lucy’s voice next through the phone, just as the door of the bathroom swung open, concealing the small object from view behind it.
Two clearly drunk-giggling girls were walking into the bathroom together. They started stepping away from the door, as it swung closed behind them, neither of them noticing the now silent phone on the ground as they spoke to one another. They were in happy spirits, until they spotted something unusual that gave them both reason to pause in their tracks. They both stood there frozen in place, staring at the far wall of the bathroom in shock, as it was littered with tiny drops and splatters of red, it was blood…

Lucy hung up her phone and glanced up at Cana uneasily.

“I got her voicemail… So… I guess you are right, Cana.” Lucy stated. Cana nodded her head as she took another drink from her mug.

“Yea told ya! I saw her booking it towards the exit with this guy, like they just couldn’t wait to get the hell outta here.” The brunette replied.

“Yea…” Lucy muttered as her chocolate eyes went downcast, locking onto the phone she was still holding in her hand. She did believe Cana, but at the same time, she still couldn’t help, but feel concern for Levy as she thought about the large scary guy who had been staring at them earlier. A hand reached out, gently touching Lucy’s forearm; Lucy glanced up hesitantly, matching eyes with Loke once again.

“You okay Lucy?” He asked sympathetically. “If you’re really that worried, we could still try and look for her.” He offered. Lucy watched him for a moment, taking in his words and considering what he had said, just to give herself peace of mind. That was when the memory of what Levy had said to her earlier, flashed through her head.

“Yes Lucy… I’m saying I just want to have sex with someone, because I’m incredibly lonely and have given up on trying to find someone to be with. I’ve got way too much on my plate right now, to try and be in a relationship anyways. I’m incredibly stressed out and in the meantime, it would just be nice to feel somewhat satisfied. I know the risk and such. I’m not stupid, but don’t you worry Lucy, because I’m not going to do it anyways. We both know I don’t have it in me, to actually do any of it.”

“I understand you’re just worried about me Lu, but I can take care of myself. I may say crazy things once in a while, but you know I’m not actually going to go through with any of my silly ideas.

“I’m sorry, it’s just we’re here… and… We don’t know anyone on this side of town and… Well you know, if I ever was going to do it… Here and now, this would be the time and the place to go through with it.” She had said looking forlorn.

Lucy sat there pondering to herself as she remembered the words Levy had spoken to her earlier that night. She’s right, the blond thought to herself. I gotta stop babying her. Levy is more than capable of taking care of herself and this is what she said, she wanted… So, I need to respect that, Lucy’s mind spoke. She’ll be okay… Her mind reassured her as a weak smile graced her lips, her eyes locking with Loke’s again.

“No…” She began. “Levy will be okay. She’s one of the smartest people I know and if this is what she wants… I’m not about to get in her way.” Lucy added causing Loke to smile back at the blond.

“Now, that’s the spirit!” Cana chimed in, raising her mug. “Like you said, Levy’s a big girl, so I
wouldn’t worry about it! Hell, I wouldn’t be surprised if we don’t hear from her until tomorrow!” Cana added cheerfully.

“Yea…” Lucy replied with a soft giggle at Cana’s antics as she stared down at her own hands sitting in her lap. Loke’s hand came into view as he gently rested it over hers, making her cheeks go pink as she looked back up at him.

“How about we dance? What do you say?” He asked softly, his voice soothing. Lucy stared up at his serene smile; she could feel her worries slowly melting away as she looked at him with her warm face.

“I would really like that.” She replied, making Loke’s smile widen.

Gajeel stumbled back from the sudden impact of the knife puncturing through his skin, his arm instinctively going up and pushing Thibault away. Levy was watching in horror, her hands cupped over her mouth as tears spilled from her eyes, thinking the worst. Thibault’s form went falling backwards from Gajeel’s forceful push, his rear landing on the concrete. Gajeel’s eyes shifted from Thibault, to his own body in shock as he soon discovered the knife Thibault had been concealing still stuck in his left thigh. Blood was beginning to soak the fabric of his pants around the area where the blade poked out.

Levy’s hands fell from her face in shock as she realized Thibault’s thrust forward had faltered somehow, causing him to miss stabbing Gajeel in the abdomen, where he had appeared to be aiming. This had only happened, because Gajeel had been able to move back a step, after hearing Levy’s warning. Levy was relieved to discover this, as she knew stomach wounds were often times far deadlier, but it didn’t mean that Gajeel’s life wasn’t still at risk.

“Gajeel!” Levy called out to him frantically from her place behind the car. Her small body was now hanging over the hood as she could no longer hide her desperation, but Gajeel didn’t even acknowledge her, instead his sights just settled on Thibault.

“What’s this?!” He roared, his hands motioning towards the knife handle that was protruding from his leg, before whipping to his sides in balled up fists. Thibault just stared up at him from his spot on the ground with ovule shaped eyes and a slack jaw, as it was suddenly dawning on him how truly screwed he was.

Gajeel stood with his chest inflated, thus adding to his width as he inhaled a fuming breath. His robust arms were clenched on either side of his torso so tightly, that each muscle was clearly outlined by the back lighting of the club. His face was half masked in shadow; his red eyes slicing through the darkness, like that of a disturbed demon. His fangs were jutting out from underneath his tense upper lip, as he scowled. His long hair was bristling behind him in animosity, his towering height pervading over the fearful man below him as if he were his prey.

Thibault could feel his body beginning to go rigid under Gajeel’s fierce gaze. Everything in his being was screaming for him to flee from the enraged beast and so his hands began to scramble, but he soon discovered that they were shaking too severely to be effective. Instead all he could do was watch helplessly from his place on the ground, as Gajeel’s tight fisted hands began to shove into the pockets of his pants.

“Thibault!” Came Gajeel’s voice commandingly, causing Thibault’s body to become so still it was almost as if he had ceased all breathing. “You should have killed me right there, when ya had the chance…” He added darkly, before closing his eyes. He almost sounded regrettable, as his fists came rising out of his pants pockets slowly, each one now dawning a pair of black brass knuckles. His
eyes whipped open locking to Thibault’s face, as he plainly revealed his newly equipped fists.

Levy stood there frozen in place as she realized what Gajeel was wielding. Her mind flashed back to the night she had met him, an image of Gajeel wearing the brass knuckles that night too, closely followed by the picture of Bora’s pummeled face. Her heart skipped a beat and her body shuddered at the idea of what Gajeel had done to him that night and at the idea of what he was about to do to Thibault. Her mind was screaming for her to make him stop…

Even after what he tried to do to you? Came an opposing voice in her brain. Yea Levy… Don’t forget that, that man tried to rape you. Not only that, but remember how he bashed your head? Levy could feel herself beginning to rationalize it all in her thoughts. Yea… and that’s just what he did to you… Who knows what else he has done to other women… I mean he did imply that he had, had other victims as well, remember? Levy’s eyes went wide as she remembered Thibault’s words from earlier that night, when he had cornered her in the bathroom.

“Yer a lot smarter than most of the girls I go after… It’s gonna make me enjoy this even more I think…”

Levy stood there, her body straightening up, her arms going down at her sides stiffly, as her hands curled into balls. Her eyes were going downcast as she remembered the way Thibault had grabbed her and then jerked her arm back, nearly breaking it. Then the way he had pushed her into the bathroom stall, before finally slamming her head against the toilet. She closed her eyes tightly at the memories, as she bit her bottom lip painfully, all at the way she had been so easily man handled and yet so helpless to stop it, at the same time. Doesn’t he deserve this? Doesn’t he deserve to feel the repercussions, for the pain he has caused? The voice was once again questioning her.

NO! Levy’s eyes broke open at this last thought, the violence of it making her finally snap back to her senses. NO, I don’t wish to cause others pain! If anything, I want to help them! That’s the whole reason why I want to become a doctor! Her mind was now arguing back. These are my beliefs and I won’t be swayed just, because he hurt me! She thought, her brow lowering in determination as her eyes glanced back up to Gajeel, who had slowly started approaching Thibault whilst Levy had been in the midst of her internal debate. Besides, Gajeel is still hurt and this could get him into a lot of trouble! And I don’t want that! Levy’s thoughts reminded her. Don’t I? Levy’s brain suddenly questioned, but she didn’t waste time dwelling on it as she didn’t have any, instead she just hollered.

“Gajeel! Wait!” She cried out, but Gajeel made no movement to show that he had heard her, as he took a step closer to the now weeping Thibault.

“Walk away Levy!” He suddenly shouted back without looking at her. “You shouldn’t see this…” He added darkly as he lowered his body towards the man. Thibault seemed frozen in fear as Gajeel neared him; he was beginning to beg for mercy, his brow glistening with sweat. “What? Is yer wit all gone now?” Gajeel taunted the terrified man before him. “Really? And after all that shit you talked, earlier?!” He growled his anger getting away from him some, through his tone.

Levy was watching with eyes narrowed as she bit down tensely, her eyes looking at the knife still jammed in Gajeel’s thigh. He must be running on pure adrenaline, because he doesn’t seem to be at all affected by the pain… Levy’s eyes traveled back up to Gajeel’s hate filled face. First, he takes
that punch and now this... What kind of a person is he? Her mind was reeling with wonder and fear as she continued to watch the scene unfold before her.

“Gajeel! Please!” She tried again. Gajeel’s hand came flying out to Thibault’s chest, his fingers clenching the fabric of the scared man’s shirt.

“NO! NO PLEASE GOD!” Thibualt was begging him now as Gajeel began to lift him up from the ground by the collar of his shirt.

“Gajeel! Please- I-I don’t want you to!” Levy’s voice was also still begging him. Gajeel could hear her cries. Each word that flew from her mouth made his heart constrict so tightly in his chest, that it pained him. I know... He was thinking, as time seemed to slow down for him. I know you don’t want me to god dammit! But why?! Why do you have to be this way? He closed his eyes briefly as he jerked Thibault further up and into the air. Why does she have to be so perfect...? His eyelids lifted and he was now looking directly up into Thibault’s black, terrified eyes with his own narrowed ones. Why can’t she be angry?! Like I am, for what this piece of shit put her through?! His mind was shouting the questions in his head so loudly, that it made it hard for him to make much sense of anything else. Why does she have to make me question the things I do?! Even the one time, I feel like I’m doing something for the right reason and she still makes me feel like I am wrong?! Why does she always have to make me feel this way?! This guilt?!

Gajeel paused for a second; his body was standing straight up; one arm was holding Thibault just high enough into the air, that his feet were just off the ground. His eyes were staring right up into Thibault’s face, with his other arm reeled back like he was about to punch the man. He could feel Levy’s large eyes on him, from where she stood behind the car. The air was so quiet that Gajeel could swear he heard her heart beating, but it was probably just his own.

Nobody had ever held the power, she seemed to hold over him. Making him physically react to something he did on a regular basis, normally without any thought or feeling behind it. Her earned silence, was speaking all of the desperation in the world and he could feel himself regretting what he was about to do, but he knew he couldn’t stop. He just couldn’t stop himself from taking revenge for her, even if she wanted nothing to do with it. Not after the way he had found her, bleeding and exposed. Gajeel closed his eyes tightly, as the upsetting image fueled his fist forward; I’m sorry Levy! Was the last coherent thought he was able to make, before allowing himself to lose all control.

Levy gasped, her heart shattering as she watched Gajeel’s armored fist make contact with Thibault’s jaw. She slammed her eyelids shut, but it didn’t stop her from hearing the god-awful cracking sound. She quickly fell to her knees and slapped her hands over her ears as Gajeel’s punch unhinged part of Thibault’s jawbone. She tried to look again, but snapped her head away, once she saw that Gajeel was winding up for another punch, this time there was no more hesitation.

Gajeel’s fist slammed into the side of Thibault’s jaw once again, this time creating a crunching sound. Thibault’s screams were silenced and replaced with gurgles from the second blow; blood started leaking from the side of his chin, as tiny pieces of shattered bone began to poke fourth from his skin. Gajeel then lowered the man just enough, that his feet made contact with the ground, quickly punching him a third time on the bridge of his eyes socket. Thibault’s body flew down from the hit, the back of his head hitting the pavement so hard, that he bounced against it, leaving blood in his wake. Levy was trying her hardest to tune all of the violence out, when she heard Gajeel speak.

“What?!” He was shouting and Levy couldn’t hide the temptation to glance up and see Thibault’s back, now flushed up against the ground, in a heap. One of his arms then came reaching up towards Gajeel’s leg and it looked as if he were begging Gajeel to stop. She couldn’t help, but cringe once she got a glimpse at his already broken face and she immediately closed her eyes again as she
listened to more of Gajeel’s yelling.

“What’s a matter!? Hit yer head? Did you want me to stop!? Did any of the women you hurt, beg for you to stop!? HUH!? Did LEVY, you sick bastard?!” Gajeel shouted furiously his boot suddenly going up and flying down on Thibault’s chest with a loud thud. Then he stopped and stepped back and instead began to revert to pacing around Thibault’s fallen form anxiously. “And you have the nerve to say I’m like you?!” He yelled, as his foot came stomping down on Thibault’s hand. Thibault screamed as Gajeel jumped off of him and then continued to circle. “For one thing, I don’t hide my weapons, you fuckin coward!” This time he kicked Thibault so hard in the ribcage that his limp body flipped over to its side, as he let out a painful moan. Gajeel took a breath, his arms reaching out and grabbing Thibault by the front of the shirt again, jerking his upper body up to face him as he kneeled down. “Ya know what though, maybe yer right Thibault.” He stated, staring into what was left of Thibault’s face.  “Because like you I’m the bad guy…” He spoke as he began to slowly raise Thibault’s body up with his own, with ease. Now the two were standing again, Thibault was only on his feet, because Gajeel was holding him up. “But unlike you, I don’t go after the good ones!” Gajeel roared as his knuckles jammed hard into Thibault’s stomach. Thibault spat up blood and fell over limply, but Gajeel didn’t seem to be done as he just followed him to the ground with another fist in the air. “After tonight… Never again.” He seethed coldly as his fist came driving down again into Thibault’s flesh with another crack.

As much as Levy tried, she couldn’t seem to block out the noise of Gajeel’s onslaught on the man who had attacked her. She was kneeling down, still trying not to look in that direction, with her hands fastened over her ears, but nothing she could do was saving her from his torment. What was worst, was Gajeel seemed to only move faster and harder with each blow he dished out, as if he was becoming more immune to the pain he was unleashing as time waged on. The madness of it all was slowly wearing on Levy as she began to fear that Gajeel had lost all control and was going to kill the man right in front of her. She forced her fear to take a backseat as she realized she couldn’t let him do that. She started pushing her body up and off of the ground, to her feet. Her eyes wincing as she looked in the direction of Gajeel, where he was still wailing on Thibault, who was now unrecognizable as a bloody pulp on the cement.

“Gajeel!” She screamed hoping to break through, but he didn’t stop as his boot came flying down on the broken man once again. Then suddenly another distinct sound arose in the night, making Levy’s eyes go wide. Sirens…. Levy thought as she could hear the noise in the distance. “GAJEEL!” She cried out again, her voice cracking in desperation. “GAJEEL SIRENS!”

Finally, it was this word that made Gajeel’s body freeze. His back was facing her as he stood up straight, his head going up. Levy smiled weakly despite herself, it was mostly just out of pure relief that he had finally stopped the violence. She recognized that he was probably listening for the same sound that she had heard.

There was a brief pause between the two of them, as a cool breeze flew by. The sound of the sirens was becoming clearer, when Gajeel finally turned his head slowly. His eyes were on her, his brow hard, but the rest of his face looked relaxed, Levy watched him as if hypnotized by the gaze he held on her.

“Levy..?” He uttered out softly.

“Gajeel?” Levy’s mouth fell open at the way he had breathed her name, because he sounded so… Weak. His head suddenly turned back forwards and Levy watched in horror, as he started to fall to his knees as if he just couldn’t stand anymore.

“Gajeel!” Levy cried out, wasting no time to run towards him. Gajeel let his body fall back on his
rear as he pushed himself away from Thibault’s out cold body. Levy was on him in seconds. She fell
down before him, one hand resting on his shoulder, the other reaching towards his leg, but not
touching it. His eyes narrowed in pain as he winced and glanced up in the direction of Thibault’s
limp shape.

“No… Levy… Don’t look at him.” He muttered referring to Thibault, his voice heavy with pain. “I
don’t want you ta see… What I did to him…” He added with a labored breath.

“Don’t worry about that now.” Levy replied, her voice shaky with worry over his sudden pain. The
adrenaline that had been motivating him through the beating he had unleashed, had clearly run out.
She glanced down at the knife handle sticking out of his thigh. “You over did it… It’s making you
lose blood faster. We need to get you to a hospital.” She said as she glanced back up at his face, her
large eyes full of concern. Gajeel just shook his head at this as he leaned back.

“No.” He stated bluntly. “Can’t do hospitals.” Levy looked at him as if he were crazy.

“You have to! You could be in serious trouble, if that knife hit your femoral artery you are going to
bleed out! We might not even have that much time!”

“No… If that had happened…” Gajeel breathed out, “I’d be dead already… But listen Levy… You
need ta get outta here so ya don’t get tangled up in this mess.” Gajeel warned.

“Now isn’t that cute!” Levy stated sarcastically, but her voice was full of urgency. “I am already
tangled up in this mess, so there’s no way I’m leaving you now! Not only that, but I told you I don’t
have a car anyways, remember?! So just quit trying to be chivalrous and tell me what we should do!”

“Alright… fine…” Gajeel sighed; he was in too much pain to argue with her. “All I need from you
then, is to pull that knife out.”

“What?!” Levy cried out. “I can’t do that!”

“Sure ya can… And ya better do it quick, cause those sirens are gettin’ louder…” Gajeel grunted
back, still in pain.

“Gajeel I…”

“There’s no time for doubts Levy. I can’t do it myself with the angle it’s at. I’ll just be causin’ more
damage… Aren’t you in doctor’s school er somethin’, anyways?! Just do it!” Gajeel demanded.
Levy watched him uneasily as he stared into her with his loaded look, before wrapping her tiny
hands around the handle of the knife.

“Okay… fine! But for the record, I’m not in ‘doctor’s school’, just normal school! And I’m not even
a med student yet…” She replied nervously. Gajeel just rolled his eyes before speaking again,

“Well then, jus think of it as practice for when ya are…” He got out, before wincing again.

“Alright… On three then.” She spoke sounding insecure, her hands gripping the handle of the knife
tighter. She watched him steadily, as he nodded at her before she began her count “One…” She
began uneasily, watching Gajeel who was staring at her intensely, as if he was trying to give her
reassurance by not budging. “Two…” Gajeel’s body tensed up as he braced for the oncoming pain,
Levy’s eye’s jumped back to the knife. “Three!” She cried out, now closing her eyes as she began to
pull on the knife. It was hard at first, as she felt the suctioning air from the punctured object leak in
and keep it still. Then suddenly it slid out fast, she heard Gajeel let out an odd seething breath, but
then, that was it. Levy opened her eyes and held up the knife with both hands in amazement at her
accomplishment. It was a spear shaped switchblade knife; with a long black handle, she was
holding. Her eyes were drawn to the tip of the blade, that was covered in Gajeel’s blood. “I did it!” She spoke out, in awe of herself.

“Yea ya did good kid, but we ain’t done yet... Now we need ta get the hell outta here.” Levy looked from the knife to the spot in Gajeel’s leg, she had pulled it out from. She could see the slit like hole in his flesh and the blood that surrounded it, soaking the fabric of his pants. She lowered her hand with the knife and then looked to him with an almost saddened look.

“Wait… Aren’t you in pain?” She questioned.

“I’d be lyin’ if I said I wasn’t, but we gotta get movin’ before the cops show up here. Here, gimme that.” Gajeel answered as his hand reached out for the knife in Levy’s. She handed it to him and he wiped the blade on his already bloody pants before switching it closed and sticking it in his pocket.

“You’re gonna keep that?” Levy asked.

“I’ve got to, now. Since our hands and my blood have been all over it. It would be messier to leave it here with...” Gajeel replied motioning towards the body behind them. Levy’s eyes shifted over in the direction of Thibault’s beaten form hesitantly, before going back to Gajeel.

“Yea… about that… What are we going to do about…?”

“Him? Oh, we’re leavin him here.” Gajeel stated, as he started to try and move to get up.

“What? But wait, how can we do that?” Levy started, as she watched Gajeel from her spot on the ground, as he tried to push himself up to a standing position.

“Well do you wanna to carry him?” Gajeel responded with another groan as his body finally stood up all of the way, stiffly. His weight shifted more over to one side.

“Well no… But is he even alive?” She questioned plainly, as she also began to move.

“He is.” Gajeel stated as Levy started to stand up beside him. Her arm instinctively wrapped around his waistline to help support his weight on the side of his now bad leg. “I made sure not to kill im’, but who knows what quality of life he’ll have, after tonight.” Levy felt a chill run up her spine, as she tried to avert her eyes from Thibault’s body. “Now C’mon… if you could just help me to my bike, over there, then we can-”

“What?! Bike?! That’s not going to work!” Levy cried out as if exasperated by Gajeel’s stupidity, as the two of them began to walk carefully together.

“Why not?” Gajeel questioned, Levy glanced down at the stab wound in Gajeel’s leg for a brief second, before looking back up at his face.

“How do you expect to drive it, like this?” She questioned as if the answer was obvious. Gajeel just shrugged his shoulders.

“We’ll be fine… I’ll just take ya home and then-” Gajeel began breathlessly.

“Hell no!” Levy snapped. “You’re in too much pain and I’m not about to get myself killed on the back of one of those… Things…”

“Things?” Gajeel repeated. Levy could hear the smile in his voice behind the pain, as he sounded amused. “Guess you ain’t ever been on one before, huh? How do you know you wouldn’t love it? It’s fun.” He added still amused, but with a wince. Levy couldn’t help, but roll her eyes.
“Fun huh? You love to throw that word around in my face, don’t you?” Levy questioned, her voice dry.

“Well there ain’t nothin’ wrong with havin’ some once in a while ya know?” Gajeel replied, followed by another painful groan.

“I have my fun, it’s just apparently not up to par with society’s breed of fun is all. Which by the way, if any of this—” Levy’s free hand vaguely motioned towards her head gash and Gajeel’s stab wound as they walked. “Is supposed to be what the majority of the population considers as ‘fun’ than consider me a self-proclaimed outcast from this day forward, because I think I’ve had my fill for one night… Forever actually…” Levy mumbled the last part under her breath. Gajeel was still able to hear her, but he stayed quiet, as he realized just how right she was. This whole night had ended up playing out, like a chapter right out of the devil’s book of hell and the worst part was, it wasn’t even over yet. “Besides the point though… I still stand by what I said… You’re too hurt to drive anything, let alone a bike! And the first thing I said to you too… We need to get you to a hospital!” Levy finished her voice commanding, but then without warning Gajeel suddenly stopped walking causing her body to be pulled back a few steps with his. “Hey!” She stopped and turned around. “What gives Gajeel! We need to keep moving!”

“Levy, I want you to go and leave me here.” He stated firmly, Levy glanced over to him, his face looked very serious.

“But I can’t Gajeel, I told you I don’t-”

“Then find some other way outta here, because like I told you before, I can’t do hospitals and more importantly you need to be away from here.” His voice was demanding now as if he was ordering her. Levy looked at him, her eyes full of helplessness as he stood there planted, bowed over his bad leg. The sirens had gotten extremely loud, as the two of them had walked to the outskirts of the club’s parking lot. Levy glanced up to the flashing lights of a police car. Luckily, they were far enough away, that they wouldn’t be spotted just yet, as the night’s darkness helped to mask them.

“Gajeel!” Levy cried out as she could feel herself beginning to panic. Gajeel folded his arms and stood there before her like an unmoving brick wall.

“Go Levy…” He commanded. She glanced over her shoulder again, as the police car neared the club’s entryway, that was when she just couldn’t wait anymore. She was done playing games with him, her hands reached out grabbing his arm as if he were her only security blanket.

“No, I’m not leaving without you!” She cried out. “I’ll take you to my place if I have to, but we need to go now! Don’t make me do this! Don’t make me leave you here! Let me help!” Gajeel’s eyes went wide as he looked down at the girl who was now basically hugging his arm. What? Why does she… Why does she care so much all of the sudden?

“Levy- I.” She looked up at him with pleading eyes, but a firm brow.

“You saved me. Please let me save you…” She begged. Gajeel stared at her with an amazed expression. He was at a loss for words and instead just found himself suddenly nodding to her in shock. She had made it incredibly hard for him to say no, what with the way her small body was pressed up against his arm, clinging to him. It was at this motion she began to move to his side to help support and walk with him once again, “Okay… Good… Thank you…” She answered softly, her eyes glanced up and her head shifted in a direction, down the road. “There’s a subway entrance not far from here… We can get on there and get to my place that way.” She explained. Gajeel looked at her for a long moment, his head swelling with all sorts of dirty thoughts. No, stop! Get that shit outta yer head now, she’s just tryin’ to help… He closed his eyes tightly; whisking them away as
best as he could. Which he found to be pretty hard every time he was in her presence, especially now when she was touching him.

“Sounds good…” He finally groaned out an answer.

“Okay… This way.” Levy spoke her tone almost businesslike as her body turned them in the direction they were looking. Then slowly the two of them began to make their way down the street, just as the cops had arrived at the club, managing to escape just in time. Gajeel trying his best to swallow not only the pain from his leg, but also the pain of desperation, that only she seemed to stir within him.

“Whoa…! Hold on Lucy.” Came Loke’s voice as he laughed, his hands clinging to the blond to keep her steady. “You’re getting away from me now.” He added still laughing as Lucy’s one arm was hanging around his neck, her head and shoulders leaning back and away from him, as she let her weight tip backwards carelessly. There was blissful smile on her now red face, as she giggled at her dance partner. The two of them were on the dance floor surrounded by other dancers; one of them included Cana who had decided not to stray too far away this time.

“No Loke, I’m not going anywhere!” Came the happy blonde’s voice as her weight continued to lean back and away from Loke’s body, as she let him hold her up.

“Oh wait! Hold on!” Loke cried out as his one arm reached up and around her back for a better grip, pulling her lower body against him as a means to keep her from falling backwards, as she almost seemed like she was going to. Her head and back came propelling back up so that her face came right in front of his.

“Hi.” Lucy uttered out, as her face was only mere inches away from his.

“Hi.” Loke repeated, a smile on his face.

“Man she is sloshed, or what?!” Came Cana’s voice from over Loke’s shoulder as she had been watching Loke’s struggle with a now very drunk Lucy. Lucy’s head shifted over so that she could see Cana over her dance partner’s shoulder.

“Oh hey Cana!” Lucy exclaimed as if she had just realized Cana was there. Cana smiled brightly at the blond, doing her best not to laugh at her obvious drunken state.

“Hey there! Having fun blondie?” Cana asked.

“You kiddin?” Lucy asked as her head began to nod. “Yeaaa… I’m having a grrrrreaaaat time!” She replied her arms wrapping around Loke’s neck tightly as if she were hugging him, as she stood on her tiptoes. Loke just stood there and let her lean all over him as she spoke to Cana, just behind him.

“Yea well, three drinks in and one shot later, I guess you oughta be, ya lightweight.” Cana stated with a laugh. Lucy began to join Cana in her laughter, but her face looked a bit confused as if she didn’t know why they were laughing. Loke’s arm moved, swaying Lucy back some, so that she was no longer hanging over him and so that he could look at her now.

“Yea… I think we should probably cut you off for the night Lucy.” Loke stated.

“Okay…” Lucy replied sweetly her body pressing up against his as her head came resting on his shoulder. “Whatever you say Loke…” She said dreamily as her eyes closed and her head stayed on him. Loke brought a hand up to the back of her blond head, running a hand through her hair gently admiring the way she felt against him.
“Well nobody’s cuttin’ me off.” Cana stated. “I think I’m gonna head to the bar for another round, ya want anything Loke?” The brunette asked.

“Nah, that’s alright. Someone’s going to have to take you ladies home.” He answered as he continued to pet Lucy’s head as they swayed together. “You go ahead.” He added.

“Maybe that one, but I’m not going anywhere just yet.” Cana replied. “Suit yourself though.” And with that Cana walked off, leaving Loke and Lucy alone as they moved together on the dance floor. The beat of the music not really fitting the way they were dancing too well, as Lucy’s current state had her feeling like all she wanted to do was lean all of her weight on the man in front of her.

“So what do you think, you ready to call it a night?” Loke whispered the question in the blonde’s ear. “I only ask, because you seem really tired now.”

“Whatever you say Loke…” Lucy replied her voice still dreamy. Loke managed to stifle a laugh at the way Lucy was speaking to him, before asking her another question.

“Well okay… Not sure how you ladies got here, but I walked, because I live nearby. I can call you a cab or-”

“The car!” Lucy cried out as her head came flying off of Loke’s shoulder, so that she could look up at him.

“What car?” Loke asked. “Do you have one?”

“Cana!” Lucy exclaimed. “But… Oh…”

“What’s a matter?” Loke asked.

“She gave me the keys. I was spose ta drive it!” Lucy slurred. “I don’t think-”

“No definitely not.” Loke finished the thought for her. “But don’t worry, I’ll drive it.” Loke offered.

“You will?!” Lucy cried out.

“Yea sure, why not?” Loke replied.

“Yay!” Lucy cheered, her arms wrapping around Loke and pulling him into a hug that was so tight, that Loke’s face actually reddened some from the way Lucy’s chest pressed against him.

“Lucy…” Loke breathed out her name. She was really starting to make him crazy, the drunker she became, as all her shyness seemed to go out the window with the way she clung to him. His gentlemanly resolve was weakening with each movement she made.

“I just gotta talk ta Cana…” Came Lucy’s muffled voice as her face was still buried into his shoulder. Loke held her for a moment, his chin lowering over her head as his arms wrapped more securely around her. His eyes closed for a moment as he breathed her in, his body relaxing against hers. Lucy… you are making this very hard for me, because I think I really like you… So, I didn’t want to… Loke’s thoughts were speaking when suddenly all of the music in the club came to a screeching stop. Loke opened his eyes, What the...

Bright overhead lights came flashing on, making all of the dim lighting and neon colors of the club disappear. Everyone was moaning, their eyes stinging from the sudden brightness as they all glanced around confused, with squinted eyes. Loke pushed Lucy off of him some as he looked around startled by what was happening.
“What the hell is going on?!” He questioned, his hands gripping Lucy’s shoulders as his head swiveled around.

“Loke?” Lucy uttered, her eyes squinting under the bright lights as she rubbed her fist into one of them. Loke’s mouth fell open, once he spotted two men in uniforms making a path through the confused crowd, with large flashlights in hand.

“Everyone calm down!” One of them was shouting as he came in the direction of Lucy and Loke. He was a man of average height, with a bit more muscle mass than Loke himself, but nothing too massive, as he still looked fairly young. He had short spiky hair that hung over his forehead freely; the hue of it was a very dark looking navy, which almost appeared black. He had a very good-looking face with large dark eyes. His facial features were sharp enough to make him appear like a very serious mannered individual, and yet just soft enough to still give him a very cool and collected appearance. “We just got some investigating to do, that’s all.” He spoke again.

“The cops?” Loke muttered, his eyebrows lowering. “Why are they here?” He asked quietly to nobody. Lucy was looking up at Loke’s very serious expression not fully grasping the situation.

“Loke?” She tried again; he turned towards her, his expression still hard.

“We should get out of here Lucy.” He stated seriously. “Go find Cana, okay. I want to be the one here, in case that officer decides to ask people questions, not you. Tell her we should leave; can you do that?” Loke asked, his voice urgent.

“Yea! Of course, Loke!” Lucy cheered making Loke smile at her, despite his concern. “Wait here, I’ll be right back!” Lucy stated before finally letting him go and turning away. Loke watched her disappear through the crowd, the smile on his face fading, before turning back to look at the officer who was making his way through the crowded club. What the hell is going on? He wondered.

“Cana!” Lucy was hollering her friend’s name as she stumbled her way through the crowd lazily, automatically heading towards the bar. “Cana!” Lucy tried again, although the music was gone, there was still the noise of conversation, as people were all talking to each other, confused by the sudden interruption of their good time.

“You lookin’ for me blondie?” Came a female voice from behind Lucy. Lucy turned and glanced up at the brunette with a large smile coming over her red face.

“CANA! There you are!” She cheered.

“Yep, here I am. Now what’s up?” The brunette asked, she had another glass in her hand.

“Cana the cops are here!” Lucy stated.

“No kiddin?” Cana replied in mock concern. “I hadn’t noticed.” She jested.

“Yea! We gotta go!” Lucy exclaimed grabbing Cana’s free hand with both of hers. “Loke’s gonna take us home! So c’mon!” The blond added trying to pull Cana with her as she turned, but the brunette’s feet stayed planted.

“Hold on.” Cana stated. Lucy turned to her friend, her face confused. “I’m not leaving now, not when things are just getting interesting. You go.”

“But Cana, your car-” Lucy started, but was quickly cut off by Cana’s voice.
“Take it, so long as you’re not the one driving it, I don’t care.” Cana stated simply, with a shrug.

“You can’t be serious?!” Lucy questioned in disbelief. Cana stared at her for a moment, a large sly smile slowly coming over her face as her free hand went to her hip.

“Man, that sobered you up a bit, huh? I’m completely serious Lucy! Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Well I- I don’t-”

“Aw what’s the matter blondie? You afraid to have a handsome stranger drive you home?” Cana asked with a laugh at Lucy’s reactions. “Come on! Live a little why don’t ya!”

“It’s not like that!” Lucy cried out, “He was, just gonna take me home.”

“Okay fine, you keep telling yourself that, with the way you were hanging all over him.” Cana replied bluntly, making Lucy’s face flush. Cana leaned in, her face nearing Lucy’s as she was still wearing her large smirk. “Just remember… Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” Cana added, her hands going over the blonde’s shoulders, pushing Lucy’s body away, back towards the direction of the dance floor. “Now take my car and have a good time for once in your life. You deserve it!” She cheered with one last shove. Lucy’s body tripped forwards, but she caught herself as she looked back at her friend.

“What about you?” Lucy asked, but Cana just shooed the blond with her hand.

“Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine… Just finnnee!” She replied her violet eyes looking elsewhere with a grin. Lucy watched her for a moment, before nodding in acceptance.

“Okay!” The blond answered before turning away and heading back to where Loke was. Cana watched Lucy walk away before breathing out in a sigh of relief.

Levy and Gajeel were just stepping into the car of a deserted subway station. Her arm was still wrapped around his back for support, as Gajeel let some of the weight from the side with his injured leg lean on her in return, his arm also around her shoulder to keep himself up. The two of them had been silent throughout their whole walk to the train car, as they concentrated heavily on their walking. The air had been unsettlingly quiet, because of how late in the night it was. They hadn’t seen a single soul since arriving at the subway until they walked into the car. There on the far end was a drunken homeless man all settled in, in one corner. Levy paused upon seeing the other person, becoming nervous at the idea of someone seeing the state the two of them were in, as the homeless man’s bloodshot eyes glanced over in their direction. Gajeel was clearly limping with blood soaked into the fabric of his pants and her, with an ugly gash across one side of her forehead.

“C’mon shrimp…” Gajeel whispered into her ear just as the homeless man looked back down and away from them in disinterest. “Don’t worry bout ‘im. He couldn’t care less bout us…” Gajeel urged quietly, making Levy swallow past the nervous lump in her throat. She nodded her head slightly, before slowly continuing her walk through the car down to the opposite end of where the homeless man was.

Finally, she reached one of the benches that faced the aisle and together the two of them cautiously sat Gajeel down on the bench. Levy let his arm slide off of her shoulders and stood up before him as he sat down. His hands went over to the wound on his thigh, covering it protectively as his upper body leaned back. His head was going up and resting against the window behind him. He closed his
eyes for a minute as if wanting to sleep, letting a low groan followed by an easing breath escape his lips. Levy watched him, her eyebrows pushed together in worry. Everything was still so calm now. It was quite the comparison to how the rest of their night had been.

“Are you okay?” She questioned with a nervous voice. She knew he wasn’t, he was clearly in pain, but she had no way to help him at the moment. Gajeel opened his eyes and looked at her, a weak smile was forming on his face, his head still leaning back.

“Yea, don’t worry yer self over me shrimp.” He answered. “I’ll be fine…” He uttered just as there was a chiming sound and the doors to the subway car went closed. His eyes shifted over to them. “Looks like we’re on our way…” He looked back at her, “So maybe you oughta take it easy now too, after all, you did hit yer head.” Levy hesitantly brought a hand up to the spot where she could feel the pain coming from, her fingers just settling over the cut.

“I’m okay…” She mumbled, her eyes going downcast. “It’s just a bump…” She replied quietly, glancing back up at Gajeel. Their eyes locked for a moment and silence washed over the two of them, once the car started to rock some. Levy’s feet stayed planted, keeping her balance as the subway train began to hum and then jerk forward, indicating that they were finally setting off. The two of them were both staring at one another, until the car began its forward motion, causing Levy to close her eyes and breathe out in relief.

It had been a while since she had been able to do that, seeing as the night had gone from one crazy thing, to the next, without even allowing her a minute to process everything that had happened. She slowly turned away from Gajeel, stepping up to the window on the other side of the car across from him, her hand resting on the back of the benches as her eyes opened to look out them, her vision glazing over the tunnel walls.

What am I doing…? She began to question, slightly glancing back at Gajeel from over her shoulder. Taking him back with me? To my place… She glanced back to the dark windows, her eyes landing on her own reflection. This is crazy… Her thoughts continued. This whole night is freaking crazy… She glanced down at her open hands, that were quivering violently. Her nerves were basically shot after everything she had been through. And I just left my friends there, without telling them anything… She thought her head going back up, I don’t even have a way to reach them now… Her mind spoke as she thought of her phone, abandoned in the bathroom of the club.

Gajeel was watching Levy from his spot on the bench as she stared out the window without a word. His eye was paying special attention to a large white marking with an orange lining on the back of her left scapula. Something he hadn’t been able to see before, as her jacket had covered up the exposed back of her dress. Something he hadn’t been able to see before, as her jacket had covered up the exposed back of her dress.

His eyes narrowed on it, in confusion, what is that…? His mind was questioning as his eyes followed the odd flowing shape of it. Some kind of… Tattoo? Well ain’t that a surprise…? Wasn’t expectin’ the shrimp to have any ink… He thought, as his eyes went back up to her wild blue hair, looking over the side of her face, that he could see slightly. Yer just full of ‘em shrimp, aren’t you? He thought as he glanced down at the hands covering his wound. Cause I sure as hell never expected this… He thought watching her, the night playing over again in his head.

He had never expected to come across Levy that night, let alone get her tied up in the huge mess, that was his life. Although in the beginning he had made it clear that he was interested in her, that wasn’t anything different than what he normally did where she was concerned. And as always, she gracefully shot him down, per their usual relationship, by chalking it all up to this being Gajeel’s way of wanting to tease her. But tonight, had been different; he had actually made a genuine advance on
her, because he was just so tired of the games. They could only be fun for so long, because in the end, they didn’t make the fact that he did actually want her, go away.

Something between them needed to give and being there at the club with her dressed like that, had been the push Gajeel needed. That, and the fact that she had tried to slap him. But then she had resisted him, which was something he hadn’t given any thought to, until it actually happened. Most women he usually put the moves on were only too happy to give themselves over to him willingly, but he was also aware that most of those women, weren’t as level headed as Levy was, and didn’t know as much about him, like she did. They were just strangers after sex and that was all he wanted from them in return, as well. Levy though, she knew him and she was smart, too smart to want to get involved with him.

Gajeel had known that when he made his move on her, but he had kind of hoped she would see past it, so that they could still have their one night together. He had gotten it in his head that if he could just sleep with her once, then maybe she wouldn’t bother him as much as she did, because he would no longer be stuck on the fact, that he couldn’t have her. That way, maybe she could just flow out of his mind and no longer torment him with guilt. A one-night stand would also work out in her favor too, as he would then finally leave her be, once they did the deed. She’d be the center of his world for that one night and then she could walk out of his life forever and never look back, leaving him to carry out his work once again in peace. Her curse subsequently lifted once he had finally gotten his taste.

This had been the whole mindset behind his actions towards her at the club, up until the point she had gotten herself into trouble with Thibault. After she had rejected him, he had taunted her with his presence, as just another way to get to her. In hopes that she would cave to her inner desires, as he still believed that she felt them too. But then Thibault happened… That bastard had targeted her as a means to get to Gajeel and this is where they had ended up. Levy had almost been raped…

Gajeel was staring at Levy’s back, his eyes automatically gliding along the arch of her spine, down to her tiny waist, his eyes landing on her backend. He couldn’t help it; he could feel his fingers itching to touch her as he stared at the fullness of her butt.

That moment when he had found her, he had never felt so conflicted with emotions in his whole entire life. The rage he had felt was so strong, it had taken every ounce of will power he had, not to kill Thibault right then and there. The only thing that had made him spare the man, was his more crucial desire to make sure Levy was okay. The amount of relief he had felt upon saving her from that fate, was almost painful to him. He could feel his heart pound furiously at just the memory of it. He had never wanted to touch someone so much, as he had wanted to touch her right then. He had just wanted to wrap his arms around her and never let her go, so then that way, he knew she would always be safe and it could never happen again.

Gajeel could feel the intensity of that feeling, from his memory driving him to slowly move his body forward. His feet slowly pushing his body up, despite the excruciating pain he felt in his thigh. Levy didn’t notice Gajeel get up from his bench, as she was still lost in thought over all that had happened. He was quietly walking up behind her. The wound in his leg was pulsing with pain with each baby step he inched towards her, but he was ignoring it. He was good at ignoring those types of pains, but the ladder… He just couldn’t do it anymore; his self-restraint was going out the window, as she stood there teasing him with that curvy frame of hers.

Gajeel halted, his body standing just behind her when he noticed Levy stiffen up, as she must have finally realized he was there, but he wasn’t about to let that stop him from what he was about to do. He had made it his job to sneak up behind her. It was how he always seemed to get to her. She should have expected it by now, but she never did.
His large hand came reaching out gently, brushing the side of her waist, his fingers reaching around to her lower stomach as he settled his hand there. He could feel her freezing up at his touch, her breath hitching as Gajeel’s long fingers stopped just before her belly button. Gajeel couldn’t help, but smirk at the tiny sound as he carefully applied some pressure to bring her whole body just a little closer to his larger one, engulfing her size with his own.

“Gajeel…?” Came Levy’s voice quietly. Her heart was thudding loudly and she could do nothing to hide the shiver that rocked through her, at his sudden touch. Gajeel felt the movement move through her and into him, but he didn’t stop as his other arm came wrapping around the front of her now. He let it rest just across her abdomen, his hand settling over her rib cage, just below her breast. He secured her against him protectively; she could feel his chest against the back of her shoulders now. Her head automatically leaning back against him. His body was so large as it incased hers, she couldn’t help, but feel like he was swallowing her with it. “What’re you…?” She was questioning nervously, but she didn’t move or try to fight him.

Now that he had secured his grip around her, his head was moving forwards as his other hand lifted up from its spot on her stomach, only to move up so that he could brush some of the hair away from her ear. Now that he had cleared the strands, he began moving his freehand to the other side of her neck, his palm flushing against the softness of her creamy skin. His head came down just above her shoulder so that he could speak right into the exposed ear.

“I’ve got you right where I want you now.” His voice was low. Levy felt her chest constrict at the feeling of his breath on the side of her face. His nose was pressing into her hair as his other hand moved up her neck to the other side of her head, through her hair, caressing her. “How does it feel?” He asked her next, making Levy’s eyes drag up lazily, to her own reflection in the window, as she saw the way he had himself pushed up against her, his hands gently moving over her.

“Like I’ve gone from one monster’s claws into another’s…” She stated softly, watching him turn his head towards the window so that his red eyes were looking at the same reflection she was.

“Is that what you think?” He asked, the arm around her frame pressing into her some as he swayed it up and down over her stomach and ribs as if just trying to get a feel for all of her. His hand was moving down from her head back to the side of her neck again, his large fingers just reaching the end of her cheek. Levy stayed silent, her eyelids lowering some as she felt the hand over her ribcage creeping up higher, the top of his hand just grazing the bottom of her chest where her bra started. “Levy?” His voice was almost like a wakeup call, as she could feel her self-melting into his movements.

“You…” She began. “I don’t know what to think of you anymore Gajeel…” She answered weakly as his hand glided over her neck up to the side of her cheek. He caressed it once with his thumb, before wrapping it under her chin. He gently pushed her face towards him so that he was looking right into her tired eyes with his own.

“You’re always fightin’ me… When will you learn that I’m not gonna you fight back?” He asked. “I’m not going to force myself on you… That’s not who I am, and when it comes to you…” He began his face nearing hers, Levy could feel his finger running along under her chin, tickling her and making her angle her head up. “I don’t need to.” Gajeel said quietly as his mouth came just over hers hesitantly, giving her that chance to pull away, but Levy didn’t budge and so his mouth crashed onto hers.

Levy felt her eyes going closed as his warm mouth fell over hers, his tongue plunging in, before she could even get a grip on what was happening. She let herself be taken over by him as he kissed her.
unmercifully, her body practically going limp as if she were water in his hands and it all felt amazing. His strong arm securing her in place, his large hand playing up her front, his large frame towering over her and making her feel safe. Her heart was soaring at his touch, even as his one hand was slowly moving up to rub over the bottom of one of her breast...

Wait... no!

Levy’s thoughts screamed. Her eyes were opening as she suddenly remembered where they were. Her head was pulling away from him, his hand going to her shoulder as she jerked her chin out of his grasp. Her body was jetting away from his. Far away enough, so that she could partially turn towards him. Her eyes were large and full of shock, that he had just kissed her and even more so, that she had completely let him.

“I thought you were in pain?!” She stammered. Her face red from what had just happened. Her chest was heaving from the lack of air. Gajeel’s eyes went to hers, his face serious.

“Who says I’m not.” He uttered reaching towards her again, but Levy held up a hand and stepped back away from him. Making him freeze and look at her, as if she had just lost her mind.

“Gajeel!” She snapped. “Stop!” She demanded.

“Is that really what you want?” He asked getting angry himself. “Or are you just being stubborn’?”

“Just, because I agreed to help you, that doesn’t mean I’m going to sleep with you.” She explained, her voice upset. “Now, will you please just sit down!” She pleaded pointing to the bench across from them. Gajeel stared at her for a moment, his anger fading as he looked into her glossy eyes. Her expression looked deeply troubled and confused. His head looked over to the bench, before he looked back at her.

“Have it your way shrimp…” He began as he started to hobble his way back over towards the bench. “My leg is hurtin’ again anyways…” He mumbled, as he slowly let his body fall back onto the seat. “Sittin is probably fer the best.” He finished as Levy watched him.

_Idiot.... She was thinking in her head as she looked at him, his pain never ‘went away’. She shot him an angry glare her arms folding over her chest.

“That’s why you should have let me take you to the hospital!”  She snapped.

“Nah… I like this better.” Gajeel replied smirking at her, making Levy roll her eyes at him.

“You’re such an idiot…” She muttered under her breath.

“Maybe… But it was worth it, because now I know for sure.” He stated eyeing her down, his smirk fading. Levy raised an eyebrow at him, as if unimpressed by his words.

“What do you know, exactly?” She questioned as if exasperated.

“Now I know that you want me, just as badly as I want you.” He stated bluntly.

“For god sakes! Is that all you think about Gajeel?!” She exclaimed her arms going up in frustration with him.

“When I’m around you, yes. So, you would really be doin’ me a favor, by just givin’ into temptation already.” He replied folding his arms over his chest. Scolding her like it was somehow her fault, that he wanted her as badly as he did. Levy just found herself staring up at the ceiling of the car in
annoyance with his response.

“You’re so romantic.” She spoke, her tone dry and full of sarcasm.

“Hey, you should be flattered! Cause I can promise you I ain’t ever been this desperate to get with any woman before.” Gajeel snapped back, his tone drenched in frustration over that fact.

“Like I believe that.” Levy answered doubtfully. Gajeel shook his head as he still sat there with his arms folded, looking her up and down.

“You think I’m joking, but I’m not. I’m dead serious. You’ve taken residence up here.” He said, pointing a finger to his head. “Whether I like it or not, and I don’t foresee ya leavin’ anytime soon Levy.” He finished, his expression hard as he watched her intently. Levy paused, her arms falling limply to her sides, as she took a breath.

“Why…?! Why do you have to be so damn honest?” She asked desperately, wishing he had just kept that confession to himself.

“Because one of us oughta be.” Gajeel answered bluntly.

“Well what am I supposed to do with this truth, Gajeel? Am I supposed to feel guilty or something? For what I’ve ‘done’ to you? Am I supposed to just throw myself at you out of pity?!?” She cried out, clearly outraged and upset, but what made it worse was Gajeel was suddenly laughing at her.

“Trust me, if you and I ever have sex it definitely won’t be outta pity…” He jested with a grin before looking back up at her. “But… No shrimp.” He added, all of his laughing had stopped. “Ya don’t have to do anything ya don’t wanna do.” He replied, his voice sincere.

“Then quit messing with my head…!” Levy pleaded.

“Is that what ya think I’m tryin’ to do?” He asked.

“I think… I think I just want to get this night over with…” She answered, turning away from him. Gajeel watched her, a studded brow raised. He wasn’t trying to make her upset or confuse her. Hell, he hadn’t even intended on confessing all of that stuff he had just said to her, but it all just came flying out of his mouth before he could even stop it. Being around her just seemed to make him do stupid things like that all of the time.

“Don’t worry shrimp.” He stated, making Levy glance over at him. “This night will be over before ya know it and then all of this will just be a distant memory… I promise I won’t let anything that’s happened here tonight get back to you.” He said sincerely.

Levy looked over Gajeel with her large hazel eyes for a long time, after he had said this to her. And he looked back, a weak smile over his face and finally after a few seconds she found herself returning it.

“I think I know that much Gajeel…” She began softly. “You do always seem to protect me first…” She continued, her eyes going downcast. “Thank you for that… But more importantly… Thank you for saving me tonight.” She finished looking back up at him. “How is your pain?” She asked next.

“Eh… not too bad…” He answered patting his injured leg with one hand.

“Okay… good… Just sit tight a little longer. We’re almost there.” Levy replied her eyes going back to the window. Gajeel kept his eyes on her steadily; I’ll try too shrimp. He thought as he found himself looking over her frame once again. But ya don’t make it easy… And now… He closed his
eyes. *I gotta forget that kiss*... He thought as he brought a hand to his forehead, opening his eyes. *Fuckin’ idiot*... His brain scolded as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

Chapter End Notes

Milk it for all it’s worth.
Make sure you get there first.
The apple of your eye.
The rotten core inside.
We are all prisoners
Things couldn’t get much worse.
I’ve had it up to here, you know your end is near.

You had to have it all,
Well have you had enough?
You greedy little bastard,
You will get what you deserve.
When all is said and done,
I will be the one to leave you in your misery and hate what you’ve become.

Intoxicated eyes, no longer live that life.
You should have learned by now, I’ll burn this whole world down.
I need some peace of mind, no fear of what’s behind.
You think you’ve won this fight, you’ve only lost your mind.

You had to have it all,
Well have you had enough?
You greedy little bastard,
You will get what you deserve.
When all is said and done,
I will be the one to leave you in your misery and hate what you’ve become.

Hold me down (I will live again)
Pull me out (I will break it in)
Hold me down (better in the end)
Hold me down.

You had to have it all,
Well have you had enough?
You greedy little bastard,
You will get what you deserve.
When all is said and done,
I will be the one to leave you in your misery and hate what you’ve become.
Heaven help you.

*“Had Enough”* By Breaking Benjamin - A song dedication from Gajeel to Thibault.
*shivers*
Chapter Summary

Loke does manage to get Lucy home despite her drunken state and he may, or may not, end up leaving her alone. Levy struggles to grasp what just happened between her and Gajeel on the subway, but can’t even manage to take in the craziness of the night either. She is finally able to get Gajeel home, but he of course, manages to make things very difficult for her, with his constant teasing and frustrating personality. Both of them are forced to ignore a thick sexual tension between them, in lieu of the situation... Gajeel finally works up the nerve to come clean to Levy, but where will it land him with her?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 6: Tension

Lucy and Loke were slowly making their way down the quiet hallway of Lucy’s apartment building in the dead of night, after an enduring climb up the stairs, made especially difficult by Lucy’s drunken state. The blonde’s clumsy feet were hammering down hard every few steps as she struggled with her balance. Luckily, Loke was there to help support her as he walked with one arm secured around her waist and Lucy’s own arm draped over his shoulder, but it still wasn’t going all that well. Lucy seemed to be on the verge of passing out. Her eyelids were half opened and her cheeks were flushed as they walked. Her head was practically limp and hanging down, as Loke kept her on her feet.

“Lucy?” He questioned, as the two of them tripped over her dragging foot. “You still with me?” Loke asked as he paused, his head shifting up to look at her. Her eyes were closed as her head hung down, her hair cascading around it.

“Loke?” She uttered softly, her eyes opening. Loke smiled as he breathed out in relief.

“Oh good… You’re still awake. You need to tell me which door it is.”

“Thirtyyyyy sevvvven...” Lucy slurred out the apartment number, her eyes going closed again. Loke watched her for a moment, she was so tired and he was pondering if there was any easier way to do this.

“Hang on Lucy… I have an idea.” He stated making the sleepy girl open her eyes as he started moving more in front of her, with her one arm still draped around his shoulder. Lucy lifted her head once faced with Loke’s back as he took hold of her other arm and set it over his other shoulder.

“Okay, c’mon. I’ll carry you on my back.” He spoke bending his knees some so that he could hoist her up. Lucy let the front of her body fall over and onto Loke’s back, her arms wrapping around his
neck and shoulders, as his arm suddenly came up, wrapping around her thighs. He lifted her legs up and off of the ground, as he stood up. Her warm face rested against his head and back, her forehead was burying into his hair.

Lucy closed her eyes again, her cheeks were reddening even more at the feel of Loke’s hands, flushing up against the bare skin of her thighs, just under her skirt, but she was too tired to fret over it too much. Her fingers started to knead into his shirt and chest some.

“There we go. That’s a lot easier.” Loke spoke as he began to walk now, carrying Lucy piggyback style. Loke walked down the long hallway, passing six other doors, before finally spotting Lucy’s number. “Here we go…” He spoke softly, Lucy’s eyes opened lazily as she felt the slight jolt of Loke taking the key she had given him out of his pants pocket. “We’re almost there Lucy… So, don’t worry, you’ll be able to sleep peacefully soon.” He told her soothingly as he jammed the key into the old lock, turning it until he heard a click. “Got it.” He stated as his hand now went to the doorknob turning it and nudging the wooden door open.

There was a loud creaking sound that resounded in the quiet apartment complex as the old door swung open, revealing the dark room of Lucy’s apartment. Loke hesitantly stepped inside while still holding onto Lucy, his head swiveling around in search for a light switch.

“Hmm… Where’s the lights?” He questioned quietly.

“Behinddd the doorrr…” Lucy mumbled in a scratchy voice, her one hand pointing slightly.

“Oh…” Loke replied lightly, turning and pushing the door closed, finally spotting the switch there on the wall and then he flipped it on.

Light flooded the space, finally revealing the brightly colored walls of the room around him as he stood in the small doorway. He paused seeing her dresser against the wall just ahead of him and a make-up station, with a large mirror along the opposite wall. He stepped forward cautiously onto the wooden floors, in an attempt to be quiet as the room opened up. His feet stopped once he reached her large floor rug; against the wall, across from Loke was Lucy’s pink-blanketed bed, just under a window. Set in the middle of the room was a small table and some chairs. Then against the wall just to Loke’s right, was a shelf stocked full of books and then a large desk with a pink laptop sitting on it against the same wall. Along the far wall was the door to what Loke imagined was the bathroom and then an open doorway, to her tiny kitchen space.

“Okay…” Loke muttered after his quick scan of Lucy’s neat apartment. He slowly shuffled over towards her bed. Once he reached the edge of it, he turned around so that their backs were facing it. “Lucy?” He questioned as he heard her begin to mumble sleepily. “Time to let go…” He spoke gently as he slowly lowered her onto the bed.

Lucy’s eyes slowly opened as her arms slid off of him. Her body was sinking into the mattress as Loke turned around to look at her. She had her legs hanging off of the bed with her feet on the ground and her head lowered, but her eyes were halfway open at least.

“How are you feeling?” He questioned.

Lucy let out a yawn at this, her hand rubbing her eye tiredly, not answering him. Loke watched her a bit uneasily, realizing he should probably give her something in case she did end up feeling sick later as she hadn’t struck him as someone who drank a whole lot normally.

“I’ll get you some water or something.” He added without waiting for her reply as he headed towards her kitchen.
After a few minutes of working his way around the kitchen, Loke was walking back towards Lucy with a large glass of water and some saltines he had managed to find. By this time the blond seemed to be more awake, her eyelids still looked hazy, but at least her head was up now, as Loke offered her the glass.

“Here Lucy, drink this.” Lucy’s large chocolate eyes dragged up to Loke’s face lazily, before glancing at the glass he was offering her. Then finally she took it from him slowly as if everything she did, took excessive thought and effort. Loke watched as she began to sip the liquid, before bringing the glass back down to her lap and wrapping her hands around it.

“And these too.” He finally said now offering her the sleeve of saltine crackers he had found. Lucy looked to him again and then to the crackers. “They will settle your stomach so you won’t… You know… Be so hung over tomorrow.” Loke added awkwardly with a weak smile. Lucy reached over, taking the crackers in her hand as she held her drink in place between her thighs. She took one out and began to nibble on it as Loke smiled at her sympathetically. “There you go. I swear that stuff will help.” Loke replied pushing his glasses up his nose. He glanced up, looking at a clock on Lucy’s desk that read it was two in the morning. “I should probably get going.” He spoke as he grabbed Lucy’s key and Cana’s car keys out from his pants pocket, setting them both on the table beside him, before turning away towards the door.

“Wait!” Came Lucy’s voice as her hand went rushing forwards and grabbing his. Her motion had been so fast that the glass of water had fallen the short distance from her bed to the floor and spilled. Loke’s head slowly turned to look at the blond as her large dark eyes stared up at him, like a lost puppy, the other hand was still holding the half-eaten cracker.

“Pleasee…” She begged him softly. “Please don’t go…” Loke watched her, his olive-green eyes taking in the softness of her pink cheeks and then the wetness of her lips. He snapped his eyelids closed, before he could move his sights any lower as temptation was beginning to nip at his heels, with the way Lucy was sitting and angled below him.

“No….” Loke muttered, he opened his eyes and turned towards her. “I’m sorry Lucy, but I think I really should-” He was cut off as Lucy’s other hand came gripping his arm so that both of her hands were now wrapped around his one arm as she stood up. Her face was coming close to his as she stared him down, her sleepy state gone for the moment.

“But if you leave, I’ll be alone and…” She was saying, her eyes going downcast sadly. “And then I will have messed it up…” She finished.

“What?” Loke asked confused, but he couldn’t dwell on it long, as she was suddenly pushing herself against him; his arm slipping between her breasts as she wrapped her arms around him, her head moving against his shoulder. Loke stood there stiffly, surprised by her sudden forwardness and his mouth was now sealed shut in shock.

“This is my chance… But if you leave it will be over…” She breathed into his ear as her grip on him tightened some. Her eyes were closing, as her head buried further into his neck and her face felt so warm.

Loke stood there feeling her against him, trying not to move as his heart pounded. C’mon get it together… He was thinking as he cringed. Being around forward women was nothing new to him and normally he’d be only too happy to take advantage of the situation, but there was something different about Lucy. He felt like he actually wanted to get to know her more, rather than just doing the usual jump into bed and never calling her again scenario. He had been growing bored with his normal routine for a while now and had started to consider actually taking up a girlfriend. It was something he hadn’t done in ages, but he was looking for some kind of change in his life, and he had
thought it might be nice to share memories and spend time with someone for more than just one night.

All of these recent thoughts and ideas, had come rushing forward front and center in his brain upon seeing Lucy’s face. Maybe she could possibly be the girl he was looking for? She was very beautiful and he already knew he liked her, after spending some time with her and so he hadn’t wanted to blow it. He had told himself, when he agreed to take her home, that he wasn’t going to try anything. He was just going to get her home and then call it a night, but he hadn’t counted on Lucy being the one to try and put the moves on him, seeing as she had come across as very shy, but now… Now she was drunk, and it was hard for him to ignore her like this, not when he could feel the physical reactions she was stirring within him.

“Lucy….” He sighed, biting back for a moment, before taking her arms off of him and moving away from her slightly. She looked back up at him, her face looking hurt by his movements away from her. He turned towards her, closing his eyes and straightening his glasses before opening them and looking at her more seriously. “I really like you… So, I didn’t want to… Do this…” He finished hesitantly, before he took another step back.

Lucy watched him for a moment, her eyes wide as she took in what he said. There was a long awkward pause between them, before her brow lowered.

“You don’t want me?” She suddenly questioned.

“That’s not, what I said.” Loke replied a bit perplexed that, that was what she had taken away from what he had said, but it was too late. The damage had already been done and Lucy was on the verge of getting upset, as her body went falling back onto her bed.

“It is…” She replied, her voice heavy as a hand came up and over her eyes. Her body leaning back against the mattress, her legs still hanging off of it. “Just… never mind then Loke… I’m no good at this anyways.” Lucy uttered, her voice weak.

“No good?” Loke questioned, intrigued by what she was saying as he didn’t understand what she was implying. “No good at what?” Lucy’s hand went up and off of her face, as her arms went out and gestured up.

“This!” She spoke as her arms came flying back down towards the bed. “This whole thing… Going dancing… Getting drunk… Taking guys home…” Loke couldn’t help, but smile at what she was saying.

“Why would you want to be?” Loke asked, sitting down beside her as Lucy lifted her upper body back up, so that she was in a sitting position right next to him. “What’s so great about it?” He asked her with a weak smile.

“I don’t know…” Lucy shrugged. “Cana seems to have a good time with it… Maybe that’s why she was telling me to ‘go for it’…” Lucy muttered confused. “And I just thought… Hey… Wouldn’t it be nice to do something different for a change…? To try something new…? Maybe have a little more excitement in my life…? Levy felt the same way… And now look at her!” Lucy exclaimed, her hand going up. “She went home with someone! If she can do it, why can’t I?” Lucy asked.

Loke glanced away from her for a moment, before moving his shoulder back into hers so that he was nudging her again. Lucy turned to look at him, as he met her with another one of his charming smiles.

“Because you’re you… Which is okay, because I like you.” He spoke, making Lucy’s face go pink
as she looked away from him and down modestly. “Besides…” Loke continued nudging her again. “That kinda thing isn’t for everyone… It can get pretty old, pretty fast anyways…” Loke muttered the second part as he glanced away.

“Yea I know…” Lucy replied. “I’ve just had so much on my plate lately… So, I guess I just thought it would be nice to be someone else for a night, to help me forget it all…”

“Trust me I understand wanting a change…” Loke stated, thinking of his own situation. “But you gotta find the kind, that’s right for you.” He explained.

“Yea… You’re right…” Lucy answered. “I guess this just wasn’t it…” She turned to look at him, her eyes digging deep into his, with a sad yet sincere look. There was a small warm smile over her lips. “I’m sorry about everything… Loke. You’ve been really sweet.” Her hand went up to his, as she graced him with that same beautiful look. Loke stared at her warm face and dark shining eyes, his throat going dry as he felt their bodies lean right up against one other.

“Yea… You don’t need to apologize, but…” Loke began nervously, as he brought a hand up to the back of his head, sweeping his crazy red hair. “I better get going.”

“Yea…” Lucy replied as the two of them began to stand up. There was a stiff silence as the two of them began to head towards Lucy’s door. Once they made it, Loke reached for the knob, his hands suddenly trembling strangely as he felt this odd crushing weight on his chest. Lucy was watching him in the doorway, standing there in her stunning dress still.

Just like that huh…? Loke’s mind was questioning. Yer just gonna leave…? His brain was asking him as he gave Lucy the once over, his hand frozen on the doorknob. Yes… Came an opposing voice in his head.

“Bye Lucy.”

“Bye… Loke…” Lucy spoke, her voice soft as her eyes went downcast.

Loke watched her, she looked so sad. Her fists were clenched at her sides and she started to turn away from him and that was when he just couldn’t bare it anymore. His hand came reaching towards her, catching her shoulder.

“Huh?!” Was the only sound able to stumble out of Lucy’s mouth, before Loke turned her around and pressed his lips up and over hers, both his hands resting loosely on her shoulders.

“Huh?! Was the only sound able to stumble out of Lucy’s mouth, before Loke turned her around and pressed his lips up and over hers, both his hands resting loosely on her shoulders.

Lucy stood there in shock as Loke kissed her softly, he didn’t try anything other than to just move his lips gently over hers. Then he finally pulled away, his lips leaving hers slowly, his head pulling back up, to look down at her. Lucy watched him, her face still completely surprised, as if she hadn’t even comprehended what had just happened.

Maybe… Maybe I shouldn’t have done that…? Came Loke’s thoughts now, doubling back, per usual as Lucy had yet to say anything.

“I’m sorry!” Loke exclaimed. “Was that the wrong thing to do…? Please forgive me!” Loke spoke as he began to turn back towards the door. “I’ll just… Go now. I’m really sorry Lucy, you just-” But he was suddenly cut off as Lucy’s hand came back over his. There was a small smile over her lips as she pulled him back in, towards her. Her hands gripped the sides of his shirt for balance as she reached up, her face moving closer to his so that she could capture his lips with her own. This time the kiss was much deeper and Loke found his arms going around Lucy’s waist as he felt her press her chest up against him. His warm tongue was making its way into her mouth.
He had put up a good fight… But even he knew he had been beaten by her kiss. His gentlemanly resolve instantly broken the moment she had pressed her lips against his.

It was well into the early morning hours as Magnolia rested peacefully sheltered under the black shadow, that was the vast sky. The damp sidewalks of the city were aligned in the glow of streetlights and flickering stars, as the crisp atmosphere of fall wisped through; the crinkle of dead leaves playing on its breeze like a harp. Their sound was the only noise disrupting the quiet; the deserted residential blocks were so still and lifeless that they resembled that of a canvassed cityscape. That was until the fluid line of the horizon was broken by the shape of two lone silhouettes, clinging to each other in the night as they moved among the array of buildings.

It had felt like an eternity of silence to Levy since they had left the subway station. Her one arm was snugly wrapped around Gajeel’s back as they walked at their gradual pace. Her other hand was up towards his chest in an effort to keep him from falling forwards and in turn he had his arm resting across the back of her shoulders for support. Each one of their movements was organized together by crucial amounts of teamwork, as they made their way down the street cautiously, in an effort to prevent any further damage to Gajeel’s injured leg. The two of them had been walking like this for about twenty minutes, having to make several blocks in order to reach Levy’s apartment. Luckily, they had finally made it to her street and the building wasn’t much further, which had the small girl breathing out in relief.

Gajeel was no lightweight; in fact, his body was so large and heavy that Levy had felt like she was porting an anvil over her spine. If she didn’t know any better she would have almost considered asking him what his diet consisted of, her mind picturing a variety of screws, bolts and scrap as if somehow, his stomach contents were made of metal.

She could feel the corners of her lips curving up at the thought. The bizarreness of her own mind, was doing its part to keep her sane with the amusing idea as a way to keep her distracted, from all of the looming dark thoughts that wanted to settle in. The recollection of what she had been through that night, coupled with the exhaustion from it all, had only been building in her small body as she continued to tote his weight and the weight of their strange relationship over her shoulders.

**Relationship…?** Levy’s mind echoed the word questioningly. That word had so many meanings, but for the first time ever, Levy was wondering what it meant for her and Gajeel specifically. This wasn’t something she had ever imagined herself troubling over, even if it was reluctant, it had still become a valid question. Most likely, because it was too difficult to ignore now after everything that had happened, especially while in the midst of the awkward silence that had fallen over the two of them.

What had happened back there on that subway car? As much as she wanted to know the answer, she didn’t want to make herself go over it again. In fact, she was trying like hell to not let her brain slide right back into that moment, because she was still just so bewildered by it. She had let Gajeel kiss her… And what was even more ludicrous about it, was that he wasn’t being an ass about it right now, as they walked. Based on all of her experiences with this man, she had expected to hear some form of gloating on his part, for at least the whole walk home, but instead he hadn’t said a word. Choosing silence over his usual egotistical remarks and it was that response from him that actually made everything worse, because it was just so… unfamiliar to her...

Levy had known Gajeel for nearly four years now and although she had only seen him sporadically throughout that whole time, she still felt like she had a pretty good read on who he was as a person, despite her ‘dislike’ of him. During this time, she had learned to expect three things from him. One being that when Gajeel was around, then most likely trouble was as well. Trouble of the illegal
nature, via his work and although his illicit activities were not normally obvious, she had learned that there was usually more to them than meets the eye, taking place somewhere behind the scenes and so avoiding him was probably the best course of action.

Two being that he was incredibly arrogant in pretty much every way possible and that meant he was bound to annoy her with every other word he uttered, yet another reason to avoid him. And lastly, three, without fail every time Levy knowingly ran into Gajeel, it was customary for him to hit on her. This had quickly, become Levy’s highest expectation from him, so much so, that it would be weirder if he didn’t put the moves on her at this point. Most of the time it was just flirty comments here and there, as bold as they were, they were still just words and Levy was more than ready to fire back with a few of her own. She was an avid reader after all and so she had a far superior vocabulary, but she could never be as crude as he was.

Their meetings would always begin with Gajeel approaching Levy first, normally without her acknowledging or noticing him. Then he would start up conversation by teasing her, before dropping an actual line or two. Then after much retaliation on Levy’s part, he would finally accept that she wanted nothing to do with him, before sending her one last cocky smirk and departing. That basically being the end of it, until the next time they would run into each other. This scenario sufficing as a good sum up, for just about every interaction Levy had ever experienced with Gajeel. Well... Almost...

There was one major exception to this rule that would occasionally take place, even though Levy had done her best to forgo it entirely. It came in the form of a heavy ‘tension’ that would sometimes arise between the two of them, usually spawned from a certain look or touch that would play on Levy’s denied attraction for Gajeel and his admitted attraction for her in return. When these situations happened, it would throw them both off of their game. Gajeel would handle it by becoming uncharacteristically quiet, as if not expecting to be affected as much as he was, and Levy would be left practically stuttering in embarrassment. Then once the moment would pass, Gajeel would usually ease the mood back to normal by saying one of his usual obnoxious quips, and then their relationship would just fall back into place as if the foremost situation had never even happened. But tonight… Tonight he wasn’t doing that.

Instead he was just silent, almost as if he was trying to punish her; at least that was how it looked in Levy’s eyes. She recognized it as his way of forcing her to relive what had happened on the train over and over again. Allowing her the peace she needed to think about it, was probably the worst thing he could do to her right now; because it stirred that same odd ‘tension’ she would sometimes feel emitting from him, within her. Causing her normally brilliant mind to be clouded with anxiety, her body stiffened by some kind of peculiar anguish that she couldn’t quite distinguish. His strange behavior flooring her beyond belief and all she could do was wonder. Was he maybe thinking about it just as much as she was?

She couldn’t tell and that bothered her, because there was just no way she was going to ask him if he was. She wouldn’t dare give him the satisfaction of admitting that she was thinking about their kiss. She wanted so badly for things to just be normal between them, so that she could pretend it hadn’t even happened like they always did, because nothing even remotely close to that ever had before, but there was nothing she could do… She was stuck… So… Instead, left to her own devices, Levy began to force herself to think about the only other thing that could possibly distract her mind from going back to that moment. That basically consisted of everything else, from the pain of the bruising cut on her forehead, to the continuing struggle of their walk and even to the chaos they had endured that night.

She closed her eyes for a brief second, as she quickly recounted the events in order. Everything from being with Lucy as she almost began a catfight, to having to put up with Gajeel’s stares, to then
almost being raped and forced to witness the length of violence that Gajeel was capable of. It was hard for her to comprehend it all, as the memories raced through her mind. The whole night sounded so fabricated, like the script to a dark soap opera or like the plot of one of the many drama novels she had read. If someone would have told Levy a week ago she would be going to a club, she wouldn’t have even believed that part, let alone the rest of it.

And yet… Here she was. A character, living the words like fiction, fulfilling her roll with one goal in mind, to stay on her feet until she reached the resolution of this hellish story. *Stay grounded;* she thought, reminding herself, because if she didn’t, she knew she would never get through it all in one piece. And so, that was why, that was why she carried on. One step at a time with Gajeel and now she was stuck with him and his silence, but that was okay, because she felt like she actually needed him there.

Despite finding his quiet demeanor unsettling, his presence overall was something of a blessing to her, way outshining all of the other negative feelings that threatened to take her like a warm blanket. It was hard for her to explain the logic of it to herself, but oddly enough she felt like the only reason she could stay in the right mindset was, because he was there, by her side. That comfort she felt in him, probably explaining why she had allowed herself to become so vulnerable with him on the subway train.

That feeling was surprisingly strong too, despite everything she knew about Gajeel as a person. Even though she found him arrogant and annoying. Even though he wouldn’t stop hitting on her, even though he drove her crazy, even though she knew he was bad, even though she had seen him basically kill a man, even though she knew he was a monster… None of it mattered to her, because deep down in her heart, she knew he was on her side.

After all, he had come back to save her, even after she had basically told him to fuck off and so she could take comfort in knowing, that he wouldn’t abandon her when she needed him most. That he wouldn’t let her fend for herself, which she was grateful for, because she knew she was weak.

She had gotten herself into a situation she couldn’t reason her way out of with Thibault and the way he had so easily taken control of her physically, made her shudder. If Gajeel hadn’t of come back for her, she knew she would have never forgiven herself for what would have happened. He had though, and so now the idea of him being around for her, during all of this, made her feel safe, because even though he was a monster… When it came to Levy, Gajeel was surprisingly tame. She knew the two of them would get through this whole thing with teamwork. Their walking together like the perfect metaphor for their whole night; one step at a time, cautiously and together.

Levy was so wrapped up in these overwhelming thoughts, that she didn’t even realize how close they were, until she glanced up and saw her building only a mere twenty feet away. The relief and excitement of this discovery was renewing her faith and feeding her with newfound energy as her head perked up. The previous events of that night were now temporarily fading from her mind, as her thoughts resettled on the future instead.

“There it is, just ahead!” She cheered, breaking the unspoken law that had formed between them, to not speak.

Gajeel’s eyes glanced up at her and then at the structures they were nearing. A cluster of old fashioned bricked buildings, with a series of small courtyards in front of them. They were clearly apartments.

Levy couldn’t help, but notice that he still wasn’t ready to speak for whatever reason, but at this point she didn’t care. All she wanted to do was get him inside as quickly as possible, so that they could both rest, because she felt like she was on the verge of collapsing from exhaustion. They were so
close, that she could feel her limbs beginning to ache as they anticipated the coming break.

“Come on…” Levy urged as she began to try and quicken their pace. Gajeel tried his best to obey and keep up without a word, as he now stared at the building before them. They finally gained some ground and approached a smaller section of the building that protruded out from the complex. Within minutes the two of them had finally arrived in front of the single white door.

“Hang on…” Levy spoke taking her one hand off of Gajeel’s chest, so that she could reach into the small hidden pocket of her skirt. Gajeel watched her for a second, but then looked away. His head looking up and around at the complex that surrounded them with curiosity, noticing how old and beat up the place looked. Levy had pulled out a single key ring with two brass keys on it and then proceeded to put one in the lock of the door.

“This ain’t the place you lived in last time…” Gajeel finally spoke as Levy turned the key to unlock the door. She paused for a moment before opening it, as she took note of the words he had just spoken and how he had said them. The reality that Gajeel had actually been in her place of residence once before sinking in, as the memories of that time played through her mind like a movie, the recollection of it not sitting well in her stomach. Now why the hell did I miss him talking again? Was her next thought as her brow lowered in annoyance.

She turned her head to look at him, her eyes staring right into his as she held his look with wonder, but Gajeel just stared right back at her, making no movement. He was holding a straight face, but Levy wasn’t stupid. She could feel her mood darkening towards him, as she knew he had just said that, as another way to get her riled up. Reminding her he had been to her home once before, as just another way to shove it in her face and god damn him, it had worked! She could feel herself becoming angry. He hadn’t opened his normally overbearing and arrogant mouth the whole entire time they had been walking and then when he finally did, he had chosen that to say?

“No… No it’s not.” She stated impatiently, with her eyebrow arching up before looking back at the door to open it. “People do this thing sometimes, it’s called ‘moving’.” She added. Her voice sounding dry and causing Gajeel to smirk at her, as he moved the arm he had rested over her shoulders more securely around her. His fingers were bracing on her, making her tense up a bit.

“That tongue of yers is so sassy and so smart…” He began in her ear. “And now I know what it tastes like.” He finished smoothly; his voice going lower as he moved his head closer to hers so that he could emphasize the smug look he was shooting her. His smirk began curling up more deviously, his words and expression making Levy’s cheeks go noticeably redder.

God damn him! Why did he have to wave that in her face now?! Her only saving grace was that she knew that his teasing meant that things between them were already back to normal, but now that they were, it left her questioning her own judgment once again. What the hell was I thinking!? Missing this Gajeel?! Take him back, I want mute Gajeel instead! He was so damn arrogant and she couldn’t even think of anything to retort.

Her cheeks puffed out in frustration, as she bit down and ripped her eyes off of him with no words. His eyes stayed on her pink face, a small smirk still tugging at his lips as she pushed open the creaky door to her apartment building. Then the two of them began to shuffle inside; it was a bit difficult to get Gajeel’s large body through the doorway with Levy’s help, what with trying to squeeze the two of them in at once.

“Remind me why I’m helping you again?” She asked after a brief silence, as the door closed behind them, once they were finally through.

“Ain’t that kinda obvious shrimp?” Gajeel questioned, as they passed by a set of stairs and then
approached the only other door in the small entryway.

“No.” Levy cut him off before he could say anymore, not answering his question. “Remind me, by staying quiet.” She finished as she now gripped the more jagged of the two keys on her key ring. Jamming it into the rusted lock of her door, before beginning her marathon of a struggle with the old knob in an attempt to just turn the key. Gajeel’s eyes were looking up and all around, before glancing back at Levy, as she continued her fight to open the door.

“You live on the ground floor…?” He asked her randomly, as if that fact surprised him.

“So… What about it?” Levy asked, her eyes never leaving the door as she continued to rattle the knob, making Gajeel’s free arm go up and behind his head.

“Nothing… Just… Well it ain’t the most safe place er anything…” He spoke, his words trailing off as if he wasn’t sure he should have said anything at all. And it was with that statement, that Levy’s hand finally ceased its assault on the stubborn door. Her head slowly turned back to look at him, with a raised eyebrow.

“Wait a minute…. What?” She questioned him deeply confused. Was he implying that he was worried about her? That seemed like the case, although she was having a hard time believing that he’d just come out and say it like that, for whatever reason.

“What?” Gajeel questioned obliviously in return, making Levy shake her head at him in annoyance at his clear avoidance.

“No, you know what. You said it. What the heck are you talking about?” She asked him, not buying his stupid act. His eyes shifted off of her and around the room as if trying not to look at her.

“Easy access.” He stated bluntly, still not looking at her.

“Okay… And… What’s your point?” She asked him, her voice leading. This finally got his eyes back on her, as he looked her over like she was crazy for asking such a question.

“That means anyone could just break in whenever the hell they want, that’s my point. Kinda figured you knew that already shrimp.” Gajeel stated as Levy just stared at him in disbelief, that she was even having this conversation with him, of all people. Someone, who she knew for a fact, did crime. She couldn’t even fathom how someone who probably broke into people’s apartments on a regular basis could be hypocritical enough, to lecture her on the safety of her own.

“Are you serious right now?” She questioned.

“Course I’m serious, someone like you oughta know better.” At that Levy, could feel her irritation with him increasing as her hand went flying back to the key sticking out of the lock. She began rattling it harder out of anger and frustration with him and the damn door for being so difficult.

“That’s not what I meant. Maybe I do know better, but maybe I didn’t have a choice, did you ever think of that?!” She snapped, finally ripping her hand off of the key altogether and then into the air. “Besides nobody could get through this damn door! I have a key and I can’t even get it to open half of the time!” Levy yelled, her frustration piquing.

That was when Gajeel’s arm reached over beside her shoulder, his hand gripping the key and turning it in one firm motion, finally unlocking the door. Levy stood there watching with amazed eyes as he pulled out her key and moved his hand back towards his body, offering it to her in an open palm. She turned her head and looked down at the key in his hand, before looking back up at him, as he was eyeing her with a hardened look.
“Don’t be naïve.” He stated, his face grim. “This old ass door could be easily kicked out, but the real issue is yer window. Anyone could get in through there at ground level. You need to be careful.” Levy could feel her skin warming up as he said this to her. His voice was firm and yet full of concern. He wasn’t messing around, but the nerve of it all, still ticked her off. Who the hell did he think he was? She wasn’t a child, nor was she stupid. Just, because she had gotten herself into trouble tonight, that didn’t mean she was a magnet for it or anything. She quickly snatched her key up from his hand, before snapping her head away from him, her cheeks reddening.

“I’ve gone this long without needing your help Gajeel… Except for tonight… So, quit trying to watch my back, because I don’t need you too.” She finished, her hazel eyes blazing into the door in front of them, as she leaned forward and reached out grabbing the knob.

“But I like watching yer back…” Gajeel replied, his head moving back and his eyes trailing down the back of her form, until they finally settled on her butt again. “Hell, I could watch it all night long.” He stated.

Levy could feel his eyes on her and she made sure to shoot him a death glare from over her shoulder. He quickly glanced up, in an attempt to not get caught. They matched eyes for a moment, as Levy glared at him and Gajeel just stared back blankly, as if saying, ‘I didn’t do anything.’ Then Levy’s hand pushed open the door as she held his look for a second longer, before finally looking forward into her now visible room.

“I am just too tired to deal with you right now.” She spoke as she brought her arm back around him and glanced up at his face impatiently. “So if you-” But she was quickly cut off by Gajeel as he smirked at her and then spoke.

“I get it shrimp, I’ll be good.” Levy held her stare on him for a second, before rolling her eyes with a sigh.

“Good…” She breathed out, as the two of them hobbled forward through the doorway of Levy’s apartment. Once they wrestled their way in, Levy reached over and pulled down the switch of a single lamp on a table against the wall beside them.

Gajeel’s eyes glanced around the tiny room in amazement as the dim light illuminated the small space before them. It wasn’t an apartment at all, but more like a studio, and it was littered with books everywhere. Books opened, closed, stacked, on shelves, on the floor, on tables. The room had two large shelves that reached up towards the ceiling full of more books on the opposite wall and a small path that led to a door where Gajeel guessed the bathroom was. To the left was Levy’s twin sized bed against the wall and in the corner. Her window was along that same wall just above it and then there was a smaller bookshelf at the foot of it. There was a large desk with another small lamp against the opposite wall of her bed. Along that same wall was a tiny kitchen nook with some covers and a small sink, followed by a tiny fridge and a closet door and that was about the extent of it.

“This… This is not an apartment.” Gajeel stated as he couldn’t help, but wonder why Levy was living in such a hole in the wall, place. Levy looked up at him cautiously, not knowing if she wanted to hear what he was about to say next. She could feel embarrassment settling in at how messy her apartment was, what with the books all over. She was sure that was what his next comment was about to be about.

“I’m-I’m sorry about the mess, but I’ve been too busy with school to clean… Or organize… And, and I haven’t had company over in ages… And…” She began to stutter, but trailed off as Gajeel turned his head down to look at her, their eyes matching.

“No, I couldn’t care less bout that. They’re just books. It’s just… This is where you live?” He stated
as he glanced back up, his eyes darting around the room again, still sounding confused by that fact.

“Yes… Why’s that so hard to believe?” She asked clearly not understanding why he was so surprised.

“Cause this ain’t hardly anything…” He replied. Levy could feel her heart sinking at his words, for whatever reason. She didn’t know why, it wasn’t as if she was trying to impress anyone, let alone Gajeel, but for some reason it was still discouraging.

“Well this is what I have so… If you want somewhere better than you’re on your own.” She muttered letting go of him, forcing him to stand limply on his own as she took a few steps out in front of him. Gajeel was watching her back as he realized what an ass he was being by the way her voice had sounded when she spoke.

=“Look, I din’t mean it that way…” He trailed off awkwardly, rubbing his neck as she turned towards him, her downcast eyes glancing back up. “It’s just… Well… What happened to the other place?” Gajeel asked as his hand ran up his neck, to the back of his head now. He couldn’t help, but remember how much bigger and nicer her other apartment had been in comparison to this dump.

“Well… I didn’t want to deal with the hassle of having a roommate ever again after living with Daphne…” Levy answered, their eyes meeting for a brief second.

“Guess I’m to blame fer that, right?” Gajeel questioned looking away. Levy couldn’t help, but smile weakly despite herself, as she glanced down.

“Well no, actually… Although it’s true you certainly didn’t help the situation any… That wasn’t the reason why, I promise you… There were many reasons why I couldn’t stand living with Daphne,” Levy answered as Gajeel looked back at her and then she looked back up at him. “She was just difficult to be around at times… What I mean is… Well… She was kind of…” Levy’s eyes dragged around the room hesitantly before finishing. “Well… Crazy…” She finally uttered vaguely as if trying to tip toe around the subject.

“Now that’s a mild way of putting it.” Came Gajeel’s muttered response as he folded his arms and continued to stand over his bad leg.

“Gajeel…” Levy scolded weakly, but she was smiling somewhat amused as well. “You have no right to judge. You didn’t even know her name, if I’m remembering it right…”

“Look, if there was anything worth knowin’ about her, then trust me I learned it that night.” Gajeel stated his eyes going up again, “And they say sex with crazy chicks, is supposed to be the best there is.” He scoffed as Levy just stood there glaring at him. “More like the most annoying.” He continued as he glanced back at her, finally catching the displeased stare. “What? You heard her, din’t you? Bitch wouldn’t shut up.” He snapped, making Levy shake her head at him.

“If you really want to stay here tonight, then do yourself a favor and you, shut up, because I don’t need, nor want, to be reminded of that night… Ever…” Levy uttered, her voice darkening.

“And you think I do?” Gajeel asked, as if offended.

“I don’t know Gajeel… But what I do know is that you like to make me uncomfortable.” Levy replied, all amusement completely gone from her tone now.

“Ah hell no! I was basically done with her the moment she opened her mouth. Pretty sure I even covered it up at one point! Maybe even tried to smother her with a pillow…. I dunno anything to make her shut up.” At that comment Levy’s hands clasped over her ears, her eyes going up as if
mortified by the details he was telling her.

“Please stop or get out!” She snapped.

“But I just got here.” He replied innocently, Levy’s hands dropped down at her sides in frustration. For whatever reason, she really couldn’t handle hearing anymore about that night with Gajeel and her roommate. Thinking about it made her genuinely upset for some reason, like her stomach was knotting up and she didn’t know why, but it needed to stop.

“Yea! And you’re barely in the door and you’re already driving me crazy!” She snapped her small body heading towards him and the door just behind him. Her hand taking hold of the doorknob as if she was about to open it and just shove him out.

Gajeel got a look at her face as she did this. Her eyebrows were crossed and her face flushed with anger. Her eyes looked somewhat glossed over as if she was really struggling internally. His eyes widened and his arm went up, his hand pushing on the door just as Levy had tried to open it, making it slam closed, before it could even really open.

“Wait Levy.” Her head snapped up at him. Her eyes wide and somewhat reddened as if to say ‘what the fuck do you want now?’. She looked both very angry and exhausted… Gajeel could feel himself swallowing back some guilt as he looked at her clearly upset expression… He did enjoy exasperating her, but maybe now wasn’t really the time for it, considering everything she had been through. This realization successfully making him out to feel like an idiot, but he just couldn’t seem to help his behavior around her, she always made him into an idiot.

“I’m sorry, I swear I’ll stop talkin’ bout it now.” He spoke clearly, trying to sound as sincere as possible. She looked at him for a long moment as he stared back at her with wide eyes.

She was reading his expression and the way that he had spoken to her and what she took note of was, that he had called her ‘Levy’ instead of ‘shrimp’. This being something he usually seemed to do, when he was trying to be serious or so she had noticed. Her eyes went downcast for a moment as she thought to herself. Gajeel was looking up, as if worried that he had gone too far, until she suddenly sighed.

“Fine…” He heard her say, making him breathe out in relief through his nose, so that she wouldn’t notice. She looked back up at him with a low brow, as her finger came flying up towards him, pointing right into his face and nearly touching his nose. “But keep your word to me Gajeel. Be… ‘good’.” She said using the same word he had earlier, causing Gajeel to smirk at her weakly.

“Yea… yea, I got it.” He stated as if brushing her off. Then she moved her body back beside him, her arm going back around to help support him once again. He looked down at her at his side before continuing, “But just as one last side note from that night… I think that next morning made it all worth it.” He added as he began to eye her, paying special attention to the small exposure of her chest, that he could now see from the angle he had over her. Levy didn’t catch him looking thankfully, but she knew what he was getting at. It was a vague mention of how he had woken her up the next morning and caught her in her pajamas, before frazzling her for the first time with his highly sexual teasing. She rolled her eyes at the comment, but she did feel flattered on the inside. She wasn’t about to let him know that though.

“Gajeel…” She warned, her voice light, but he stopped her with his own.

“I’m done, I swear I ain’t gonna say anymore bout it.” He stated. “Just go back to tellin’ me how ya ended up in this tiny ass place.” He added quickly as if trying to change the subject. Their bodies turned cautiously together so that they could better face the room now and prepare to move more
inside and out of the doorway.

“Oh yea… That… Well, it’s simple really. Without a roommate, my options became very limited… Financially.” She stated, her eyes glancing around. “This is all I can afford right now…” She finished quietly, her eyes going back down. Gajeel glanced down at her for a moment, letting her words sink in before speaking.

“Eh… Ain’t no big deal shrimp, don’t worry.” He finally replied, making Levy glance back up at him as he grinned at her. “You’ll be a doctor someday, then ya won’t ever haveta worry bout money er anything like that.” He added. Levy let out a breath as she glanced at the room before them.

“Yea… That’s the plan…” She replied longingly, there was another brief moment of silence as Levy pondered Gajeel’s words.

“Besides… You don’t take up much room, right? So, it probably works out just fine fer you. A tiny place, for a tiny… Person…” Gajeel stated with a wide grin at her, making Levy shoot another glare up at him. Just when she thought he was being sweet for once, he goes right back to his teasing ways. “What?” He asked with a shrug. “Aw c’mon ya can’t be mad at me fer that one… Just tellin’ it like it is, ain’t nothing wrong with it… In fact, I like that yer small.” He finished, holding Levy’s stare, until she finally just shook her head and looked back down. “What?” He asked again, sounding defensive as if he didn’t understand what he did wrong this time. “Just sayin.” He added one last time.

“And that’s just it, you’re always ‘sayin’ something.” Levy answered with a sigh again. “Just… Come on… We need to get you off of this leg.” Gajeel was silent for a brief moment as the two of them began to shift through the room together.

“Where we headed?” He asked after a minute.

“I’m taking you to the bed over there.” Levy answered, her head motioning up towards it. Gajeel couldn’t help, but smirk at this revelation.

“Sounds good to me.” He stated and Levy could hear the lift in his voice.

“That’s not what I meant and you know it.” She retorted simply as they made their way carefully, in an attempt to not stumble over anything on the messy floor.

“Maybe… Doesn’t mean I can’t pretend. Ya did say it after all.” He answered and Levy could still hear the smirk in voice.

“You amaze me.” She chided. “Sex really is all you think about, isn’t it?”

“No it ain’t. I got plenty of other things to think about. It just comes up a lot.” He answered jokingly, making Levy’s eyebrows lower over her eyes in outrage.

“It does not! You bring it up all of the time!” She raged back as they walked, but Gajeel was just smiling, despite her clear annoyance.

“Just around you, like I said before…” He answered her, making Levy misstep over a book slightly at his confession, as her hands gripped around him tightly. Gajeel paused as he watched her, the color in her cheeks was returning. “Figure that out, why don’t ya?” He then asked, his grin widening on her, exposing those fangs of his.

He could see her becoming visibly flustered by his words as well as feel her tensing up as she held to him tightly. The feeling of her arms around him like that, only encouraging his need to push her
further. How the hell was he supposed to stop, when they were like this? His brain was turning into mush at the feel of her against him and yet his mouth couldn’t seem to stop, as if he had no control over which smart ass comment was about to come out next.

“Please… Stop.” She begged and with that one plea Gajeel knew he had most definitely gotten to her, as he stepped on one of her books. It was just too easy to get her on edge and just too much fun as well. That, and it played on his belief, that she was just as much into him, as he was into her. In moments like this, he could tell she was struggling to hide her true desires towards him, but then she would always double back on him like she was now. It made it difficult, because he didn’t want to push her too far if she really was that unsure and confused, but at the same time… He was waiting for that damn wall to just break already!

Gajeel quickly looked away, his mouth slamming shut and his lips going straight with frustration. Her shy reactions were making him feel flustered and he didn’t like it. Better stop now while I’m ahead… Cause this is killing me…

They finally reached her bed and her arm went open allowing him room to turn around slowly. Then she motioned for him to sit down in silence and so he hoisted himself onto her bed with his arms so that his legs were hanging off of the side, feet on the ground. He looked down at his boots for a moment, before finally speaking again.

“Should probably get these off, eh?” He asked reaching his arms down towards them, not wanting to put them on her bed. Levy watched him carefully as his face cringed slightly from the pain of his bending motion.

“Uhh-- Maybe I should get them for you?” She offered worriedly, not wishing to see him struggle with any more pain.

“Nah… I got this shrimp. I’m fine.” Levy watched him as he began to undo his boots. Standing there, with an unsure expression over her face.

“Okay… Well then I’ll be right back.” She replied hesitantly, her head looking off.

“Sure thing.” Gajeel replied as he continued to get his boots off and with that Levy nodded curtly, before walking away, into the bathroom of the small studio.

After a few minutes Gajeel managed to get his boots off and let them fall to the floor as he slowly brought his legs up and onto the bed. Then he hoisted his body into the headboard cautiously, his face screwing up with the pain of each movement, but he didn’t stop until his back was finally leaning back, against her pillow. Once there he didn’t force himself to move anymore, as he was tired of enduring the pain. Instead he just settled for folding his arms over his chest as he took in Levy’s small messy living space once again.

For some reason, he had never imagined her as being broke, even though it made perfect sense considering she was a college student. Probably, because he had always placed her on a pedestal in his mind, seeing as he knew she was hard working and intelligent. These qualities about her, making him think that she must have come from a well-pieced together family with money, the complete opposite as him. He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly feeling very stupid for making such an assumption about her. Poor girl didn’t even have room for a couch in this tiny ass ‘apartment’.

That’s right there’s no couch in here… Where the hell am I gonna sleep? His mind was asking as the question had just occurred to him. He glanced down at the bed he was sitting on. Cause this… Ain’t
gonna work… He wasn’t about to push Levy to sleep on the floor for him. He could hear her making noise in the bathroom. We could share it… He could sense the idea of it exciting his mood and making his face feel warm, but he quickly shook his head to wake himself up from that fantasy. Ha yea… That ain’t gonna happen, as great as it would be… There’s no way in hell she’d go for that and honestly, I don’t blame her… He thought as he looked down at his own hands. Just the mere idea of sharing a bed with her was making his brain go wild; he honestly didn’t think he could trust himself to not try something in such a scenario. Not with her and not in such a tiny bed where they’d be forced to sleep practically on top of one another… Gajeel could see a multitude of images of him and Levy now playing through his brain, doing nothing to subside the heat in the back of his neck. He closed his eyes tightly for a minute… Stop… His head was growling as his teeth clamped down tightly, his eyes opening. Get that outta yer head now!

Just as he was trying to let these ideas fade away from his mind altogether, Levy was finally returning. Gajeel glanced up, his face guilt ridden from all of the fun scenes he had just been imagining about her. She was standing there, staring at him from her spot in the middle of the room, holding a large bowl and some kind of cloth in her other hand.

“Don’t get comfortable.” She commanded. Gajeel couldn’t help, but smirk at her, almost like he might laugh as his hands went up defensively.

“I wasn’t plannin’ on it, trust me.” He answered bitterly as he shook his head and lowered his hands. His mind still virtually in the gutter, as his sweetest dream was instantly crushed to pieces, with the reality of her statement. Levy’s cloth holding hand went up against her hip as she shot him a very stubborn look; before making the kind of demand Gajeel had only ever imagined her making in some of the ‘wild fantasies’ he had just been having about her.

“Good, now take off your pants.”

There was a long pause once the words had left her mouth as Gajeel stared at her, his mind trying to decide if what he had just heard was real or something he had made up. No… That just happened. His brain was informing him as he looked over Levy’s serious facial expression. His brow was lowering with deep confusion as the only thing he could think to say came stumbling out of his mouth.

“What?” He questioned completely flabbergasted, because not even Gajeel could be smooth in a moment like this. Not when his head was still trying to register that he hadn’t just dreamed up her words. Levy’s eyes glanced up for a moment, before looking back down at him impatiently and then back up again, as if she was somehow innocent of all of this. As if she somehow hadn’t just laid out a stern, yet very sexual order on him.

Wow, all right…

She had been completely serious and now that he could see that, he wasn’t about to let it slide by. He shifted his body up quickly, ignoring the pain that shot through him as his legs went back over the side of the bed hastily, just so he could lean in and stare at her. Her eyes came back down to meet his again, just as the small smirk came washing over his face, like he just couldn’t hide his delight. Levy’s face was starting to go warm as she watched him stiffly.

“Don’t look at me like that.” She stammered upon seeing his face.
“You need to say that again.” Was his only reply, the tone in his voice was low, yet full vigor. He couldn’t help, but be smug; he was becoming genuinely excited as he thought about the way her voice had sounded, when she had said those words to him. Levy bit down, her head looking away from him, as the red in her face practically glowed.

“Whyyyy, do you have to make this so difficult?” She questioned, dragging the first word out, as her heart pounded and her head turned away again. Gajeel stared at her, as she refused to look back at him, his grip tightening on the sheets of her bed out of frustration. “I’m the one who’s making this difficult? She has no idea what she puts me through…” He thought, swallowing air as his chest tightened up. He could feel his mouth going dry as he clenched his jaw. He really, wanted to touch her again, but he kept himself firmly planted in his spot on the bed, out of fear of his own actions. He could feel parts of him dampening slightly from sweat, the room suddenly feeling a lot hotter and the air a lot thicker.

Levy’s eyes closed tightly for a few seconds, as she forced herself to breathe past the lump that had formed in her throat. Ugh… The tension… It was there again, she thought and her stomach was feeling sick from it. Why did she think this was going to be easy? Nothing with Gajeel ever was. Come on Levy… You can do this… It can’t be that difficult, right? Just gonna stitch him up and then get some sleep. Easy. Her thoughts were consoling her through it, as she opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling. Her head was still turned away from him. She could feel the warmth in her cheeks, spreading to other parts of her body, as her skin practically crawled. Just. Get. It. Done. She thought, as she finally turned back to look at him bravely. Her eyes slowly coming down from the ceiling, only to land back on Gajeel. Oh god…

He was staring at her with wide eyes. His hands tensely pinned to his sides, his fingers clawed up in her blankets, like he was ready to pounce on her at any second. He was no longer smirking at her, but his head was down and forward as if waiting for her cue.

“G-Gajeel?” She uttered out nervously. Her face wincing, once she got a good look at him. His expression resembled that of the starved wolf, just like it had earlier that night at the club. He was also eyeing her up and down, clearly still on edge as she spoke. Levy knew upon seeing all of this, that she needed to get it together, because she needed him to understand why she was making this request of him. But it was just difficult to get past whatever it was, that was happening between them. Th-This is ridiculous! It is just Gajeel for god sakes! Her mind was screaming.

Yea but… It’s Gajeel… Came an opposing voice in Levy’s brain seductively, because deep down, she knew she was attracted to him. It was just something she hated dealing with, and so she would always try and choke it back, into the deepest recesses of her being.

“Listen to me!” She stammered. Gajeel was already watching her as if hanging on her every word, but he said nothing and instead just raised his studded brow up expectantly. “I need you to do this… So that I can stitch up your leg… Th-That’s all.” She stuttered, her voice overly firm, as if trying to convince herself of that fact too.

Gajeel could feel his stomach practically bottom out over this revelation, his face frowning some. Idiot… He was thinking. Don’t let yer self get carried away. His head whipped down as he forced himself to calm down. Levy watched him for a moment, biting down uneasily as Gajeel stared at his own feet for about a solid minute. She couldn’t help, but wonder if he was angry with her for some reason, as if she had somehow been trying to lead him on, but he finally just glanced back up at her with a weak smirk.

“You sure that’s all ya really want? I mean ya might not be able to control yerself once I…”

“Just do it!” Levy ordered, looking up as Gajeel went right back to teasing her, easing the mood
between them, at least a little. Levy acted annoyed, but she was actually thankful he had done it. At least that was something she could work with. Whenever he got quiet and serious, that was when she really became a nervous wreck around him.

“I ain’t bout ta ignore an order like that.” Gajeel answered still with a weak smirk over her. Levy kept her eye on him, her face still uneasy, but less nervous than it had been, now that Gajeel was trying to lighten the mood. They both stared at each other for a moment as Gajeel hesitated to move.

Sure, it was easy to say the words and tease her about it, but when push came to shove, actually doing the act of taking off his clothes in front of her was a bit harder than he had imagined it would be and he wasn’t sure why. It wasn’t like him to be nervous in front of women and he wasn’t shy by any means and yet right now…

He could hear his own heart beating in his ears, as Levy stared at him with her large almond colored eyes. His palms eased some on her bed, as he let some of the air slide out of his chest slowly. Maybe it was, because they weren’t in ‘the heat of the moment’. If he had somehow known that something between them was going to happen tonight, then this whole situation could probably play out a lot differently… But the cold hard truth was, that Levy had basically denied him at every turn. Which meant that he needed to keep control of himself and his urges and doing that, in a situation like this, was making him tense. That and the fact that Levy was the one making him strip in front of her, rather than vice versa. Gajeel was used to being the one in control when it came to women and so he wasn’t really sure if he was comfortable with it being the other way. Even if he did find it extremely hot to hear Levy McGarden make demands of him.

Don’t think about that… Cause that sure is hell ain’t gonna help you relax… Gajeel’s mind reminded him as it spoke again. Now c’mon, just get this painful process over with… And it was with that last thought Gajeel finally glanced down, his hands reaching for his belt. Levy’s head turned up and away again, once she saw him finally beginning to do it. She could hear the jingle of him undoing his belt and then the sound of her bed creaking. She looked back up, as Gajeel carefully shifted his weight off of the bed and back onto his feet. His belt hanging undone, his brow low and face serious now, as his eyes were glued downward.

“So are you-” Levy began gesturing towards him with a step forward, in case he needed someone to hold onto. “Can you stand okay? Do you need help?” She asked worriedly as she could clearly see the pain in his expression, upon being back on his feet as he began to reach into his one pocket.

“As much as I’d like that…” He began, grinning weakly through the pain as he took something out of his first pocket, before than reaching into the other. “I got this.” He finished, dawning her with a comforting smirk as he took his hand out of the other pocket. “But do ya think you can take these?” He questioned, offering a cupped hand out to her.

Levy shoved the cloth she had been carrying under the arm that was cradling the bowl and then took a step closer to Gajeel curiously. She opened her palm out towards him so that he could hand her whatever it was that he was holding. He brought his hand up, gently resting it over hers, with his knuckles up. Securing the cool slick objects into her palm and then he held it there, obscuring her view of whatever she was now holding. His eyes were digging deep into hers as he leaned his head down and forward; his body slouched over his bad leg.

“They’re important, so I don’t wanna lose em, especially here.” He stated grimly. His hand finally lifted up and off of hers, to reveal his black brass knuckles now resting in her palm.

Levy stared at them for a moment with mouth agape; her mind’s eye picturing Thibault’s broken face, as she heard the echoing memory of bones being crunched and cracked from Gajeel’s onslaught.
“Can you just put em on the desk over there, so that way I know where they are?” Gajeel questioned her as she continued to stare at the metal objects in her hand for a long time without speaking, almost as if she had forgotten he was even there. He watched her for a minute, knowing exactly what was going on through her mind. He could feel the guilt building within him again, for having her be witness to what he had done to Thibault. For her being afraid… “Levy?” He questioned abruptly, finally earning her eyes back on him. “It’s just a weapon… They’re not gonna hurt you…” He stated, his voice heavy.

“I know… I just…” She hesitated as she glanced back down at the objects in her hand with wide eyes.

“If yer going to fear something…” He began intently. “Fear the man… Not the weapon he wields, because without him, it is, but an ordinary object with no power.” He stated watching her with a hard stare as she looked back up at him and they locked eyes again.

“I-I understand.” She answered timidly her hand finally closing on the brass knuckles and moving back down to her side, as she glanced down at her feet, shamefully. How was he able to see right through me? She wondered as her eyes skimmed across the wooden floorboards of her apartment. I mean… She opened her hand so that she could look at the small, yet deadly weapons, she was still holding once again… I know they can’t hurt me… It’s just… Weapons like this are wrong, aren’t they? So why shouldn’t I be afraid of them? She glanced up at him, as he was still watching her with his hard stare. I mean… Does he want me to fear him instead?

Gajeel and Levy met eyes briefly for a second, before he finally glanced back down at his pants, his hands reaching for the button. Levy took that as her cue to turn away from him and walk over to her desk quietly, so that she could set the objects down gently. Then she set the bowl and cloth down too, as she began to reach for her desk lamp.

Once again, the two of them were enveloped in an awkward quietness, as Gajeel undid the button and zipper of his pants. His eyes slowly dragging up to Levy one last time as he gripped the waistline on either side, as if about to pull them down, but he hesitated. She had her back turned towards him, as she attempted to reach for the plug of something, from behind her desk. Her short stature was making this task incredibly difficult for her, but ideal for Gajeel as it provided him with a superb angle of her entire backside. His sights setting over the strange flowing lines of her tattoo once again and then down the rest of her, before glancing back up and the other way, awkwardly. Man… This is gonna be one hell of a long night if you keep lookin’ at her like that, every chance you get… Came his thoughts as he slowly began pulling his pants down carefully. His dark boxers beginning to be exposed, before he leaned back against her bed for support. Need to think about something else… His thoughts uttered as he sat back down on the bed again, to finish getting them off with less strain on his leg.

“What the hell ya doin over there shrimp?” He questioned finally breaking the silence.

“Oh, just trying to get my lamp.” Came Levy’s voice, her back still turned as she was now kneeling on her desk chair as a means to make herself higher up. She was still struggling to untangle the cord she had been reaching for, from over her desk.

“Oh yea?” Gajeel replied, glancing up and then quickly back down, so he didn’t have to see her doing that. He finally managed to get his one leg completely free from the first pants leg, before taking off his sock too.

“Yea… I’m going to need light.” Levy answered, finally managing to pull the cord free. “Yes…
finally...” She hissed proudly.

“Yea… Guess that make sense.” Gajeel murmured, still feeling strange as he finally managed to get his socks and pants off completely. His now bare feet were on her floor, he glanced down at them before speaking again. “So… Tell me, you an expert at this er what?” He asked as Levy was climbing off of her chair carefully, with the lamp in hand.

“Well in theory I-” She began, just as she turned back around to face him, now pausing mid-sentence as he sat there on her bed. Now dawned in his black boxer shorts, giving Levy a forgiving eyeful of his lower half. “Ughm...” Levy muttered, becoming embarrassed. Gajeel just grinned at her slyly, as she turned back away from him, her head going up.

“Say, what’s wrong with you?” He questioned. Playing dumb to her reaction, but finding great enjoyment out of it as well.

“Nothing!” Levy lied. Her voice was unusually high pitched, as she refused to turn back around and look at him.

_Ugh I am terrible at this..._ She sighed inwardly. _So, awkward..._ She thought hopelessly as she glanced down. _It’s not like he’s naked or anything, so why can’t I just relax? Her mind was questioning. Still... Even if he isn’t... He’s still..._ Her mind was trailing off, as she spared a tiny peek at him, from over her shoulder. He was still sitting there with a shit-eating grin on his face as he watched her, but she only looked just long enough to rehash what she had already seen. As if she had just needed to verify for herself, that those certain ‘lines’, ‘folds’ and ‘creases’ were indeed actually there and not just figments of her wishful imagination; that and the fact that the shorts were just loose enough to not make things too obvious wasn’t helping. If anything, it was just encouraging her to steal another glance, as if she needed to investigate the matter further and make sure everything she thought she was seeing, was legit. Levy felt her face cringing at the stupidity of her own head as her cheeks flushed up brightly once again... _What the hell was I thinking? This was such a bad idea..._

“You gonna be alright there, shrimp?” Came Gajeel’s voice with mock sympathy. “Would it maybe make it easier if I took off my shirt too?” This finally made Levy whip around on him, her face looking deeply flustered. He already knew she was struggling with this whole situation and so of course he was going to try and make it more painful if he could.

“Ha ha! Very funny!” She snapped back dryly, as she held the lamp in her hand.

“Ey! Don’t blame me! This was yer idea, remember?” Gajeel replied as he folded his arms over his chest. This comment made Levy’s hands fly down at her sides, as if enraged.

“Yea! Because I wanted to help you, god knows why?!” Levy cried back. “Oh wait, I know... Because you refused to go to the hospital!”

“You just don’t get it, do you?” Gajeel questioned, shooting her a more serious look. “I can’t go to the hospital. It’s just not an option for me.” Levy’s anger eased some at this, but she still didn’t look happy as they stared at one other, “And besides... I’m pretty sure I told you to walk away. You didn’t haveta help me, because I sure as hell didn’t ask you too. You were the one who insisted on it.” Gajeel stated coldly, looking away from her.

Levy watched him for a minute, as the room grew quiet again. Gajeel seemed mildly angry with her and she found that surprising, because his disposition wasn’t normally ever bitter towards her. Her eyebrows stretched up as she looked over his scowling face, but the longer she stared at his pouting form, the less she found herself caring what he thought... Because in her mind, she felt like her
actions where he was concerned, were justified.

“That’s right…” She finally replied firmly, but her voice was quiet. “I did.” She stated, her tone becoming more pronounced, “And that’s exactly what I am going to do.” She added, earning Gajeel’s eyes back on her, as she shot him a very stern glare. “I intend on keeping my word…” Her expression eased some before continuing. “I got myself into trouble tonight… But you… You got me out of it… And this.” She gestured towards his injured leg. “This is what happened to you, because of it.” She brought her free hand up towards her sternum. “I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t at least try and help you, after what you’ve done for me.”

He sat there staring at her with nothing to say. His eyes narrowing guiltily on her as he was realizing that she still didn’t know. She still had no idea that the whole reason Thibault had even gone after her was, because of him… That all of this had happened to her, because of him and that he could have prevented it… He moved his head down, his eyes now staring at his hands as he tried to form the words, but nothing was coming out. Instead he just felt like he was choking on air, as he couldn’t summon the courage to speak what he so badly wanted to, to her.

Then he heard a noise as Levy began moving away from him to set up the desk lamp she had grabbed on the small table beside the bed. Gajeel decided to stay quiet as he watched her begin to set things up for whatever she was going to do. She started by angling the desk lamp in such a way so that the light was shining right over his exposed legs. Then she began to clear some space around the bed, so that she could pull up her computer chair in front of where he was sitting. Once all that was done, she headed to her desk again and grabbed a yellow ribbon, which she used to tie up her free-flowing hair higher, so that it was more out of her face. Then finally, she was grabbing a pair of familiar red glasses off of her desk.

“I remember those.” Gajeel stated, breaking the silence as Levy put them on over her face.

“Yea I mostly just use them for reading, but…” She walked back towards the bed; Gajeel’s eyes following her every move as she came near. She sat down in the chair she had set up just in front of him; so, that their faces were practically level. “They might help for this too, since it’s pretty delicate work…” She finished as she gave his face a once over. There was a moment of silence as the two of them sat there, facing each other. Levy’s much smaller legs, were hanging down between Gajeel’s opened ones. Finally, her eyes went downcast, before she began to speak calmly.

“Okay… I want to inspect the wound and clean it.” She stated, glancing back up. “I need to do that first, in order for me to know if I even can or should stitch it up.” She explained cautiously, staring up at him uneasily.

“Makes sense…” Gajeel answered simply.

“Okay… But listen… You need to let me know how much I am hurting you, because if it’s bad… Than stitching it up is going to be a whole different animal. Especially, because all I really have to numb you is ice and we can’t really use that until after.” She continued with a shake of her head. “Normally when people get stitched up, the spot is numbed, but we don’t have that option… So, if you can’t handle the pain than we’ll have to figure something else out…” She finished, looking up at him expectantly as he just stared back at her blankly. Finally, he realized she was waiting for him to say something, so he just nodded instead and gave her a one word response.

“Yea.”

“Gajeel.” She paused, looking at him seriously. “Do you understand what I’m telling you?” She asked him strongly. “You need to let me know, if I am hurting you.” She stated again, more
prominently as if somehow she knew he wouldn’t.

“I understand.” He clarified more loudly, his answer made Levy sigh, as if she didn’t believe him; her head was looking down. “You shouldn’t worry so much.” He had begun speaking, but Levy could hardly hear him anymore as her mind had drifted elsewhere; to the events of earlier that night, when she had witnessed Gajeel take a straight pop to the jaw from Thibault’s fist. Then to the adrenaline-fueled assault he had managed to carry out, all while having a knife still lodged deeply into his thigh… And lastly, to all of the unusually placed piercings Levy had been able to spot on him.

He’s not normal… She thought, still not hearing anything he was saying to her in that moment.

“Look.” She spoke, interrupting him; “I realize you may have a higher tolerance for pain than most other people… That’s why I’m telling you this… Because I don’t want to hurt you, so will you please just let me know.” Gajeel’s eyes narrowed on her for a brief moment as he thought about what she had just said.

She doesn’t wanna hurt me huh…? He looked her over carefully as she stared up at him in wait for his response. It’s impossible anyways...

“I don’t think you could possibly hurt me shrimp, but if I’m wrong I’ll be sure to let ya know.” Gajeel stated. Making Levy raise an eyebrow at him in confusion, before shaking her head.

“You’re hopeless.” She replied softly, making Gajeel smirk as Levy’s eyes moved downwards. “Now will you please just move your leg over here, and then sit still?” She asked, gesturing with her hand.

“You’re the doctor.” Gajeel answered, as he shifted the injured leg closer to where Levy was sitting. Levy turned her seat some as well, so that she was able to position his knee up against the end of her chair and then place her legs on either side of his bad leg.

“I’m not yet… Not even close…” She muttered softly, as her one hand came up, gently resting itself on his bare knee. His skin felt cool to the touch and she couldn’t help, but notice how he fidgeted some under the light contact. She paused for a second, feeling a meager jitter run through her bones as well. Ignore it… She told herself as her body hunched over him so that her head could lean in and get a closer look. “I’ve never seen one like that before…” Came her voice next as she got a look at the strange puncture wound the knife had caused.

Gajeel was watching her with his back straight and his neck up as high as it could be, his muscles tightening with each movement she made. Watching her head move down towards his waistline, was putting him on edge in the worse possible way. Initially he had told himself he wasn’t going to watch her, but then when she started touching him, he felt like he couldn’t tear his eyes away from her. It was taking a lot of willpower for him to remain calm ‘underneath’ her like this and then only as if to make matters worse, the fingers of her other hand were now pressing against his thigh as she practically cradled over his leg with her small body. Gajeel’s eyes were slamming shut as she began to run her fingers up the line of his muscle so slowly and softly that he felt like he couldn’t breathe… This is it… She is going to kill me… Came his thoughts as he refused to open his eyes. Then she finally spoke, but her words did nothing to ease his suffering.

“There’s the heat…”

“No kidding…” Gajeel breathed out, making Levy look back up at him quickly. She just then noticed he had his eyes closed tightly; she used that as an opportunity to look down at the mold of his shorts again, but then her eyes were quickly drawn to his other leg as he had started bouncing it
uncontrollably… Bouncing it as if he was under great constraint.

“You’re supposed to be still.” Levy stated as she looked back up at him.

“Trying…” Gajeel growled and with that, Levy looked back down. Her fingers gracing the skin of his thigh. Swaying them up towards the direction of the wound, but rather than just getting it over with, as she should have been. She was taking her time and being methodical about it. She glanced back up at him, his eyes were still shut as he seethed out a short impatient breath, but his foot had stopped moving and for once it was Levy’s turn to smirk. She couldn’t help it; he was always teasing her and she always put up with it. Was it really so bad if she teased him back? You’re playing a dangerous game Levy… Her head was warning her, because if he finds out what you’re doing… Then what? And that was the valid question, wasn’t it?

What if for once, Levy was the one messing with Gajeel? What would he do if he figured it out? Levy couldn’t stop her mind from bombarding with a series of different outcomes; each one hotter than the next and that was the moment, that she knew she needed to stop… Her face was warm and her body was practically itching to act, as her fingers continued to play over the muscles in Gajeel’s leg. Her mouth had gone dry as she flushed her palm up against it and paused to regain her bearings.

Gajeel had been super quiet and still, like he was frozen in place until the moment her hand had stopped. That was when a deep low groan had escaped his throat instead, almost as if he was in pain. She hadn’t realized it, but he had moved his other hand up and over his eyes, his chin was up in distress, from what she was doing to him. Levy blinked in shock at how he looked, because she had never seen him look as vulnerable as he did right then. It forced her to swallow, her stomach feeling hollow, because of it. She needed to stop playing games with him, because this was just getting out of hand… So instead, to help lighten the mood, she began to talk some more.

“The heat indicates that the surrounding muscles are inflamed.” She stammered as she glanced back down, deepening the pressure of her palm. “Most likely from all of the moving around you did while the blade was still lodged in.” She added, speaking if only to make things easier for herself. “We can use the ice to help with that afterwards and take down the swelling.” She finished, before her eyes began moving up to the puncture wound just below the rim of his short. “Now I’m going to clean it, so this could maybe be where you can expect some pain.” She stated. “Are you ready?” She asked.

“S’okay… Just go ahead and do what ya gotta do.” Gajeel replied still not looking at her, but at least his hand was falling away from his face and going back to her bed, his fingers gripping at the sheets. Levy stared at him, as Gajeel kept his sights pointed towards the wall, before she looked back down and hesitantly leaned back in. She brought her head down so that her eyes could focus in on the torn skin of the puncture.

Gajeel sat there in wait, his heart pounding and his brow dampening. His eyes were traveling down to the sheets of her bed, as he made sure to keep his head turned away from her. Looking at her was no longer an option, seeing as it did nothing to help him keep his cool, while she was slowly torturing him with her hands. How was he supposed to endure this without becoming ‘stimulated’? She had to know this was driving him crazy… She just has to… He wondered as his teeth came crunching down, suddenly met with the sensation of pain where pleasure had been, only seconds ago. What’s that..?

Gajeel’s head turned to see Levy treating his wound with a dampened cloth and what he was feeling was the sting from it all. He was watching her with one eye wincing as she carefully tried to wipe the blood up and around the wound with the cloth and some peroxide. He flinched slightly, before letting out a small seething breath as he felt the burn go inside of his wound, making Levy glance back up at him.
“I take it that hurts pretty bad huh?” She asked him sorrowfully as her eyes graced his face with worry. Gajeel could feel the sweat on his brow only growing from the great amount of pain he was feeling as he stared at her concerned face, but part of him was thankful for it. The pain he was now feeling was the perfect distraction. Maybe now, he could endure this night with her… And in that aspect, he was welcoming it with open arms. Pain wasn’t something new to Gajeel by any means anyways. He was basically born and raised on it; dealing with that sensation, over the feelings Levy stirred within him, was a breeze.

“Nah…” He answered making Levy shoot him a surprised look, but he only grinned at her, his studded brow crossing as if to show her that he could bare it. “I can handle this… Don’t you worry bout it, shrimp.” He answered confidently as Levy glanced down.

“Are you sure Gajeel…? Because I’m not…” She spoke softly, her eyes looked sad and far off, before she looked back up at him. “I’m worried about this, because I don’t know how much damage there is. I’m afraid… That you may have injured some of the muscle tissue deeper inside and so I don’t know if I should stitch it up or not…”

“You don’t have to know.” Gajeel stated. “Just tell me what you ‘think’.”

“What I think?” Levy repeated and Gajeel just nodded at her.

“Use your best judgment and then make the call… What does your gut tell you?” He asked. His tone was even as his eyes dead bolted to hers and his grin was gone now. Levy looked down at the wound, her eyes narrowing in thought for a second as she hesitated.

“My gut… My gut is telling me… That it would be better to stitch it up rather than just leave it to heal on its own, because then you would run the risk of it opening back up again… The way the skin stretches around the muscles in that spot, make it more likely to happen… If it were to keep reopening, there would be a higher chance of it getting infected as well…” Levy explained.

“See, there ya go. Then do that.” Gajeel replied. His voice satisfied as if her word was law, but Levy just glanced back up at him with a look that said he was crazy.

“But there’s no guarantee that I’m right Gajeel! For all we know, you could already have an infection or there could be deeper internal damage… Stitching it up could almost be more harmful to you then!” She exclaimed. Gajeel leaned his head towards her. His stare was cutting into hers so deeply, that Levy couldn’t dare look away from him.

“Tell me… Can you, do it?” He asked.

“What? Stitch it? Yes… I’m just not sure if that’s the bes-” She began worriedly.

“Then do it.” He stated, cutting her off.

“But Gaj-”

“No buts Levy… I trust you.” Gajeel replied interrupting her again, as he held her stare with his own. Levy watched him for a moment, letting out a small exasperated breath as she looked down sadly.

“Heaven knows why…” She muttered. “I’ve given you nothing, but trouble and attitude since we’ve met… Especially tonight.”

“Because yer a good person.” Gajeel answered. His tone was still even, as Levy’s eye graced him once again and now it was his turn to look down. “I know that… I’ve always known that, from the
start. I on the other hand… Am not… And if anything… It’s the other way around. I’m the one who’s always getting you into trouble. Tonight, including.” He finished looking back up at her. Levy was watching him with her large eyes shining as she looked deeply confused by his words.

“What are you saying?” She questioned. Her voice had deepened with the weight of misunderstanding. Gajeel closed his eyes tightly as his head lowered some in shame. He knew he needed to tell her, but he couldn’t help, but wonder if she would hate him once he did. She already acted as though she wanted nothing to do with him and once he told her this truth, it might make it true. The thought was painful to him, for some reason. He could feel his stomach lurching uncomfortably, as if he might become sick by it, but it needed to come out. She needed to understand that everything that happened to her tonight, was his doing; it was only fair that she be given the option to wipe her hands of him, if she so wanted to. It's her choice... You need to let her have one.

“Levy…” Gajeel spoke her name as he lifted his eyelids and met her eyes with a steely gaze, the likes of which she had never seen. “You were almost raped tonight, because of me…”

“What…?” Levy uttered her voice and face in complete shock. The pain of it forced Gajeel to shift his sights off of her paling face.

“Thibault… He only went after you, because of me… He knew I was interested in you… Not sure how, other than he saw me staring at you… He was angry with me… And so, he was just using you, as a means to get to me… I knew he was comin’ after you when I chased him out onto the dance floor, because he basically told me he was… But I didn’t know that he was going to try to…” Gajeel trailed off, his face wrenching with rage as he clenched a shaking fist. “I shouldn’t have walked away from you! I should have just sucked it up and grabbed him then! But you were mad… And so was I…” He stated, still struggling. “Levy…” He uttered her name again. “I am so sorry… I had my suspicions about him, but I had no idea that, that was what he was going to do!” He stated as his teeth clamped down, his face cringing. “I know I bothered you, but I never wanted this… I never meant to pull you into my world like this, because it’s no place for you… And tonight, I did…” Gajeel explained, his voice was so deep with anguish as he continued to squeeze his fist. “I’m sorry…” He choked out, finally done. Leaving them both wrapped up in a heavy silence. Gajeel closed his eyes tightly as Levy said nothing. He could feel his heart hardening in his chest as if suddenly being incased in iron, as he waited for her to speak, yell, scream, anything, but instead…

He felt the slight contact of her soft hand come over his clenching fist, making him immediately ease and open his eyes. He looked up to her and was suddenly floored beyond belief by what he saw. Levy was smiling at him, her eyes warm, yet full of tears as he stared back at her with wide eyes.

“You’re an idiot…” She sniffed as she shook her head. “I don’t blame you.” She told him.

“But Levy…”

“No buts…” She spoke the same words he had said to her only minutes ago, with a smile as if she might laugh between tears. Gajeel watched her in amazement as she sniffed, one tear falling down her cheek.

“I already knew everything you told me…” She explained, her voice shaky. “Thibault called me ‘Gajeel’s girl’ when he went after me. It wasn’t hard to figure out the rest, especially after listening to you two argue in the parking lot…” Gajeel looked down, still shocked and regretful by what he was hearing.

“I should have known... Yer so smart... Of course, you figured it out already… I should have given you more credit…” Levy’s hand was squeezing his, once he finished uttering these words
“Listen… None of that matters… Because…” She told him, as he looked back up at her. “You saved me... I trust you.” She finished meeting him with another smile as she once again repeated the same words he had to her.

“Levy…” He spoke her name sadly. She reached up with her other hand and began wiping at her tears.

“And I guess I should have believed you, when you told me, that you have never lied to me.” She spoke with another soft laugh. Her tears finally wiped away as she looked back up at him. Her other hand was now going over his fist as well, so that both of her tiny hands were wrapped over his one large one now. “Gajeel… All I want now… Is for you to let me help you.” She told him still smiling. Gajeel watched her, his mouth agape as he stared at her, still with an amazed expression. He had nothing now, no words to say. He was just so astonished that all he could do was look down and nod as he felt like his throat might cave in.

Levy watched him nod and her face brightened up. The tears from her cheeks were drying and she sniffed one last time. She could feel a great amount of warmth inside of her chest as she watched him. It made her so happy that she felt like she could keep crying, but she made sure to stifle the feeling, so that she could do what she needed to do.

“Okay… I’m glad.” She answered taking her hands off of his and beginning to stand. “I’m going to get the stitching utensils ready… Just wait here.” She commanded, her voice still weak from the tears as she started walking towards the bathroom. She stopped one last time before walking inside, to look at Gajeel as he sat there with his head hanging in defeat, on her bed. “Gajeel…” He looked up to her. “Thank you again…” She said with another sweet smile his way, before disappearing behind the door.

Gajeel stared at the spot where Levy had just been standing with disbelief. His eyes starting to narrow and his teeth clenching together out of guilt. The very same guilt that she always seemed to make him feel, as he just couldn’t fathom how extraordinary a person she was.

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Yep… That’s the one… Yer mine… Came Cana’s thoughts as she leaned up against the bar of the still crowded, but no longer jamming club, eyeing a certain police officer up and down. He was a slim young man of average height and messy looking, dirty blond hair that framed his face. His face was rounded, with narrow looking eyes of a dark color and very prominent eyelashes. He was definitely the clean-cut type of guy, that any girl would have been interested in and Cana could tell just by watching him, that he knew how act around women. She was also willing to bet, that he was the type to take a minute out of his work time, just to attend to one, if the girl was so willing and hot enough for him to handle. And You bet yer ass I’m hot enough… Cana was thinking with a proud smirk, as she took a sip out of the drink she was holding, her confidence never dwindling… At least in some areas.

She watched the young man finish speaking to someone with his back turned, her eyes settling on his butt, while clad in his nice work pants. Yea… It’s about that time… I could use a way to blow off some steam… Her thoughts spoke, as she slammed the still half full glass she had been holding on the bar. And… I’ll be needing a new drink on someone else’s tab… Her mind trailed off, as she started strutting towards the man with a lustful look in her eye. Leaving her drink behind, with hopes of finding herself a new one. Luckily the person he had just been speaking to, just happened to be walking away when Cana arrived in their place.

“Hello officer.” Came Cana’s overly deep voice, as the young man turned around to face her. He immediately took her in, his eyes calm and relaxed as a charming smile washed over his lips.
“Why hello beautiful lady.” Came the officer’s response. His attitude didn’t differ much from Cana’s and he seemed to pick up, exactly what she was throwing down. This made her incredibly happy, as she was usually quick to get to the point in these types of situations.

“I know you’re on duty, but tell me… Do you have a little time, for some extra… personal interrogation?” Cana questioned slyly, as she wrapped an arm around his arm. Her fingers were playing up his bicep, her one eyebrow raised… Nope, she definitely wasn’t shy… And luckily for Cana, neither was he.

“You know what, I just might…” He began, his eyes narrowing on her as his smile curled up. “If you can promise me a good lead…”

“Well, that certainly won’t be a problem officer… I assure you.” Cana replied.

“What are you two doing?” Came a deep male voice from behind Cana’s shoulder, making them both turn their heads to look with innocent faces. A second officer was sending them a cold stare down with his dark icy eyes, as Cana still clung to the first officer she had been putting the moves on.

“Oh, heyyyyy Gray…” Came Cana’s voice, as if she hadn’t been doing anything wrong. “What are you doing here?” She asked, still playing stupid and Gray just folded his arms.

“Ha, real funny… As if you didn’t know.” He spoke. “I should ask you the same thing, Cana…” Gray answered, his eyes playing over the way Cana’s arms were still wrapped around his fellow officer’s arm. Cana quickly let go of the other police officer and shrugged her shoulders as if it was nothing new.

“Yea okay, you caught me, so, what?! I don’t have a ride home, all right?!” She answered no longer keeping up the charade. Gray just sighed, running a hand through his dark hair.

“Man… Why am not surprised…?” He replied as Cana just folded her arms and pouted in annoyance of his sudden appearance ruining all of her fun. “And you. Who are you?” Gray questioned the flirting officer.

“Hibiki Lates, reporting for duty.” Hibiki replied proudly, his voice serene as he held out a hand towards Gray, but Gray refused to take it.

“Oh, so you’re the one we’ve been waiting on, then?” Gray answered, his voice full of irritation as his hand went up and his thumb pointed back over his shoulder. “We need you in the women’s restroom over there… That’s where the blood was spotted.” Gray stated, all business like. “They also found a password protected phone on the floor and a torn women’s dress jacket in one of the stalls near where the blood was found. In and around it actually.” He explained, making Cana look from Gray to Hibiki.

“Wow… What the hell happened in there?” Cana asked finally understanding why the cops had shown up in the first place, but she was ignored.

“I’m on it! Thanks for the update!” Hibiki proclaimed with a salute, as he made his way towards the restroom. Gray watched him, his brow lowering with annoyance.

“Yea no problem!” He called after Hibiki. “These guys are all idiots…” He muttered next.

“What? The cops?” Cana asked, making Gray turn on her next.

“Just the ones from this jurisdiction.” Gray replied. “And you… What the hell Cana?! These guys
“Hey, don’t blame me! I needed to get home somehow!” Cana snapped back. “I let Lucy take my car!”

“Lucy? She was here too?!” Gray asked in outrage.

“Well not anymore…” Cana mumbled, her eyes traveling up.

“Look, you need to get out of here…” Gray stated impatiently. “Elfman and I can take you home in the squad car. I’m getting ready to leave right now, anyways.”

“Who says, I want you to take me home?” Cana asked in annoyance.

“Are you serious?” Gray countered in disbelief. “Stop being so stubborn!” He snapped back as Cana folded her arms. Cana was about ready to argue back, her mouth was open, when loud shouts were suddenly heard coming from the front of the club. It was Elfman’s booming voice and it carried over all of the confused people who were still in there.

“GRAY! QUICK! I FOUND A BODY IN THE PARKING LOT!” Gray and Cana’s eyes grew wide in shock, at what they were hearing. Then without hesitation Gray jumped into action, his body darting forwards, through the loud muttering crowd towards the door.

“EVERYONE STAY CALM AND REMAIN HERE!” Gray shouted orders.

“No Cana! Wait here! I’ll come back for you!” He snapped, making Cana stop in her tracks. She watched him go, disappearing through the crowd, her mind sobering up greatly… *This is bad… What the hell happened here tonight?*

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**Extra Author Notes:**

**Monster FYI's:**

-Monster was originally; inspired by the Lady GaGa song called, well this is a no brainer… Monster. My friend and I were listening to it in the car and she pointed out to me, how it reminded her of Gajeel and Levy, thus the idea to write something was born! Now here I’m gonna go over the song lyrics and how they translate specifically into the story. The italic letters are the lyrics and the non-italics ones, are my notes. I didn’t put the whole song in there… Just the lines that matter, not the repeating ones, such as the chorus.

"Monster"

*Don’t call me GaGa*

*I’ve never seen one like that before* – Levy actually said this about Gajeel’s wound in this chapter.

*Don’t look at me like that* – Levy actually said this as well, after asking Gajeel to take off his pants.
You amaze me – Levy also said this to Gajeel in reference to ‘all he thinks about is sex’ in this chapter. Yep… I thought it would be fun to throw them in there so I did!

He ate my heart
He a-a-a-ate my heart
(You little monster)

He ate my heart
He a-a-a-ate my heart out
(You amaze me)

-These lines above are just the chorus and I tried to reference them in many ways. One implying that Gajeel is ‘hungry’ for Levy by going so far as to describe him as ‘starved’. Then by having Lucy say to Levy ‘He looks like he’s going to eat you.’ Yes, this was meant in the literal sense and the sexual one...

Look at him
Look at me
That boy is bad
And honestly
He's a wolf in disguise
But I can't stop staring in those evil eyes

-These lines above are the obvious ones, that scream Gajevy in this song. We all know that Gajeel was originally the bad guy in Fairy Tail, but I think some people seem to forget that sometimes… Well, it did happen and I actually find this dark side of him to be a very appealing part of his character, because it makes him more whole. Now there’s a reason why I went into great detail in describing him in chapter 2, because even though Gajeel is good now, he still looks the part of the bad guy. He is kind of like the anti-hero of the show. And in Monster he is still basically in ‘bad Gajeel’ phase. Look at him- Yes, because he looks dark and scary. Look at Levy- because she looks adorable and good just as her nature implies. And even Levy knows that Gajeel is the ‘bad guy’, or in this case a hardened ‘thug’, just by her first glance of him. And that is the whole reason why I decided to make these two already know each other in the beginning of the story… And the more I think about it, the happier I am with my choice. I think it makes them more interesting in this narrative, to already be familiar with each other. It makes their relationship feel more natural as well. And as for describing Gajeel as a wolf… I did that a couple of times; in fact, throughout all of Monster I try to describe Gajeel as animal/beast-like, or even demon-like, because he is the ‘Monster’ that the story is so named for. And he does stare her down and Levy cannot help, but stare at him back. There is indeed a pull there between them, that not even she can ignore, despite her resistance and denial. Whether she refers to this ‘pull’ as something she ‘hates’ that is still a very powerful emotion to be feeling and can easily be manipulated to the other spectrum of emotion ranges. I say this, speaking from experience. Often times the people we ‘hate’ are people that we care about the most, because we can afford to feel that strongly for someone who has such an impact on our lives. The range in which they change, affect or hurt us and our lives is what makes this possible. Contradiction to harmony(ying and yang) is a big part of Levy and Gajeel’s story both in cannon and in this story.

I asked my girlfriend if she'd seen you round before
She mumbled something while we got down on the floor baby
We might've fucked not really sure, don't quite recall
But something tells me that I've seen him, yeah
-Lucy is Levy’s girlfriend’ and they were on the dance floor when Lucy spotted Gajeel. Now obviously, these parts are a little different. Because although I made it so Gajeel and Levy know each other, I didn’t want them to have ‘fucked’ before. So instead, I had the flashback of Levy’s roommate instead. Daphnee having been the one to be with Gajeel and Levy being forced to listen to it… That created a different, yet still desired tension, more similar to the kind that I wanted to portray in this story. The other reason was, because I honestly couldn’t justify someone like Levy ‘hooking up’ with gangster Gajeel, and so the whole plot up until this point basically becomes that justification!

**That boy is a monster**
**M-M-M-Monster**
**That boy is a monster**
**M-M-M-Monster**
**That boy is a monster**
**Er-er-er-er**
*He ate my heart*
*(I love that girl)*
*He ate my heart*
*(Wanna talk to her, she's hot as hell)*

-Again Gajeel is clearly the monster in many regards, and that is why I am always comparing him to animals and beast. This is another part of the chorus.

**He licked his lips**
**Said to me**
**Girl you look good enough to eat**
**Put his arms around me**
**Said "Boy now get your paws right off me"**

-And this part below was the reason why I decided to make Gajeel want Levy, rather than him being the oblivious dumbass he used to be, in the beginning of the show. Don’t get me wrong, I love Gajeel in the show, but it gets old as an anime trope, doesn’t it? (cute girl likes guy, guy is oblivious to it and acts like a jerk… And yes I realize Gajeel is a tsundere) Plus, I’m already doing that in Iron Gray… I wanted a new challenge and that was Gajeel still in character, but also sexually interested in Levy and vocal about it! Also, on the subway Levy refers to Gajeel’s hands as ‘claws’ and actually calls him a monster. It’s not paws, but it was the same concept. Again, I was trying to bring life to the metaphors. It’s important to me too, that Gajeel’s type, was compared to the kind of Monster Thibault was, because I like raising the question of ‘Who really is the monster’ much like Disney’s version of the Hunchback of Notre Dame… Who is the Monster and who is the Man? You decide… There will be more of that in future chapters as well as Gajeel coming to terms with himself in that role and why it was needed.

**I wanna Just Dance**
**But he took me home instead**
**Uh oh! There was a monster in my bed**
**We french kissed on a subway train**
**He tore my clothes right off**

- Levy did want to ‘just dance’ at one point, when things weren’t going wrong… And she also didn’t want to go along with Gajeel, because she knows he’s bad. And no, Gajeel did not take her home… She took him to her home instead, because of what happened… The whole reason I went the route I did was, because in my mind, it was the only way I could see Levy taking
Gajeel home. Think about it… She’s good, she knows he’s a criminal and it would be out of character in my opinion for her to jump into bed with someone like that… Without certain circumstances… Those being 1. She knows him 2. He saved her. 3. He’s hurt and needs her help. So there ya have it… It’s all about the set up and it makes the story better anyways. And guess what, they DID kiss on a subway train! And NO, he hasn’t torn her clothes off… YET...

He ate my heart then he ate my brain
Uh oh uh oh
(I love that girl)
(Wanna talk to her, she's hot as hell)
That boy is a monster
M-m-m-monster
(Could I love him?)
That boy is a monster
Er-er-er-er
-Gajeel is eating Levy’s heart as we speak, in the non-literal sense, because he is making her feel for him. She may just be on the verge of falling ‘in love’ and she doesn’t even know it. And he is eating her brain as well, because love is devoid of logic. She knows he is bad and yet she’s doing it all anyways, despite her better judgment. Gajeel is already ‘in love’ with Levy. He’s just too dumb to have figured it out, but that’s the reason why she makes him feel guilt, among other emotions. AND YES, he always wants to talk to her and he is very attracted to her, and that is why she finds him so annoying, but he can’t help himself. He can’t just leave her alone ever, he always has to go and bug her or do something stupid. And here is the conclusion of the song. If it isn’t clear what happens at the end, then try reading it again and just know that, that is where the next chapter is headed.

Further Notes:

- Some of you may have or may have not noticed… Levy has lost a lot of items throughout this story. Her scarf, her books, her phone and her jacket… Girl needs to get her shit together, but it’s all been for one reason or another. It is important as writer, for me to remember these details, as they come in handy. If you have noticed them as a reader than good on you! Keep in mind that they might come back in later chapters.

- In chapter 2, I described the fire Levy was seeing and how it both terrified and amazed her by its power. This was both a foreshadowing and nod towards Gajeel’s appearance and what he would do in the story. Because like the fire, Gajeel terrified her in the beginning, but she was also amazed by him and what he could do and she also admired his beauty much like the fires… But it doesn’t stop there. The fire is also there to signify the presence of certain other character who I think we all associate with the wild element…HIS appearance will be important to future plot as well!

- Also I used some personification/animalification for the fire when I had it roaring at Levy and then ‘eating’ the building, because I wanted to make beast like, like Gajeel. Dragon-like even.

- Lucy’s apartment was thirty-seven, because in Fairy Tail, Loke was in the human world for 3 years and we all know Fairy Tail’s magic number is 7.

- In chapter two, Gajeel mentions that he beat up Bora, because he owed him a beating for a
friend of his as well as following Jose’s orders. The friend he is referring to, is Juvia, because like in the show, Juvia had previously dated Bora and something bad came out of it... He used her to steal from Jose.

-The girl who Levy saw in the bathroom, who spoke to Thibault, was Aries

-The beginning woman Lucy argued with was Aquarius and her boyfriend that almost knocked over Levy was, Scorpio.

-They drove Cana’s car, because Cana is the only one of the three who has a car, funded by Gildarts of course! Lucy and Levy walk or use the subway to get everywhere else, considering most places are in walking distance in downtown areas.

-Thibault at one point was actually checking out Lucy’s butt, as she was walking away from the bar with her and Levy’s drink in chapter 3.

-Cana actually knows who Gajeel is, but she doesn’t know him personally. She’s heard both the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ about him

- Natsu is not actually ignoring Lucy, because he is with Lisanna. It is actually, because of something much bigger, all having to do with him being ‘the Salamander’.

-Thibault was not carrying the knife he used on Gajeel as a weapon. It was actually just a pocketknife he carries. He only ended up using it, because he became desperate and scared. That’s why he clearly didn’t use it correctly.

-I research a lot of things and draw on my own experiences quite often in my writing. The reason Levy lives in a city and was a waitress was, because I lived in down town during school and I also worked in restaurants. That was also why I had her share the one bedroom with Daphnee, because I did that in my first apartment. I also had a similar experience while it was snowing, when Levy was enjoying her walk at night through the city and I used to be up at all hours, working on projects for school. Yes, college is stressful...

-I did not however, research what subways are like so sorry if that part was very inaccurate. There wasn’t one where I lived.

-My experience in dance clubs were also very much the same as Levy and Lucy’s, as that just wasn’t ‘my thing’ while I was in school and I don’t drink. I always ended up being the drink holder and like Levy I am very short... So, I got tossed around by the crowd.

-I had really wanted to write a fairy Tail gangster/mob AU as a gajevy story, but instead I decided to just fuse the ideas I had for that, with Monster instead and make it not be a one shot.

-I decided to have Cana go with Levy and Lucy, because it made more sense to me that’d she be the one to drag them out, rather than them just being huge partiers. And because I thought it would be a lot funnier – I love Cana

-I like to steer away from writing characters in high school. It’s over done, especially in anime. I like the idea of them being older- College is way better in my opinion. Adulthood, responsibility and it doesn’t feel as wrong, when the themes are darker or more sexual. I also
get tired of the virginity thing… Like come on… Their older, they aren’t going to be virgins… I wanted Gajeel to be familiar with women so that his game could be STRONG and that would drive Levy nuts… And I wanted Levy to feel more mature and womanly, stronger even. That way the tension for them could still be compelling in that they just don’t know each other in ‘that way’ yet… But they are still both definitely seeking it within the other, albeit subconsciously on Levy’s part.

-I also really didn’t want to name Makarov’s school something as obvious as Fairy Tail University or Magnolia College, so I used Mavis’s name instead.

-Should the story continue it will involve a lot more of Fairy Tail’s main cast, like Erza, Gray and Juvia. Other ships will be included as well, but Gajeel and Levy are still going to be the main focus and the plot will still revolve around their story, both individually and together.

-There is obviously no magic in this story, but I try to keep the spirit of what the character’s magic was in the show, alive in some way. Like for Gajeel I keep making small mentions to iron and metal. Also, his name black steel is derived from him using the brass knuckles as his weapon of choice.

-The question of what is right and wrong morally, and how characters’ feel, is what I am all about. So you can expect that to be a running theme as Gajeel struggles with who he is, where Levy is concerned.

-The Element 4 from FT work for Master Jose and have been vaguely referenced once already. They will be involved in future plot, should the story continue.

-Gajeel has done a lot of questionable work for Jose, but he hasn’t killed anyone. Thibault was the closest he came to doing that and that was out of his love for Levy… But it may just get him into a lot of trouble with certain people.

Okay… That’s about all I can think of for now…

THANK YOU FOR READING!

Chapter End Notes

Your eyes
Crashin’ into my eyes
Was I accidently falling in love?
Your words
Didn’t mean to heal the hurt
Were coincidentally more than enough

All these days I never thought
That I would need someone so much
Who knew?
But I don’t think I ever planned
For this helpless circumstance
With you

You’re scared, I’m nervous
But I guess we did it on purpose, on purpose, on purpose
Baby, I know it’s weird, but it’s worth it
‘Cause I guess we did it on purpose, on purpose, on purpose
But I guess that we did it on purpose

My dreams running into your dreams
It’s as if we wished on the same star
And my time changing all of your time
It’s a butterfly effect on my heart

All these days I never thought
That I would need someone so much
Who knew?
Who knew?
But I don’t think I ever planned
For this helpless circumstance
With you
Oh, whoa

You’re scared, I’m nervous
But I guess we did it on purpose, on purpose, on purpose
Baby, I know it’s weird, but it’s worth it
‘Cause I guess we did it on purpose, on purpose, on purpose
But I guess that we did it on purpose
Lost in darkness
You’re my focus
Love me hopeless
But I guess that we did it on purpose,
Lost in darkness
You’re my focus
Love me hopeless
Oh, you’re scared

You’re scared, I’m nervous
But I guess that we did it on purpose, on purpose, on purpose
Baby, I know it’s weird, but it’s worth it
‘Cause I guess we did it on purpose, on purpose, on purpose

Lost in darkness
You’re my focus
Love me hopeless
But I guess that we did it on purpose,
Lost in darkness
You’re my focus
But I guess that we did it on purpose,

“On purpose” By Sabrina Carpenter
Heat

Chapter Summary

Thibault, or what is left of him, is dealt with by the police. Levy stitches up Gajeel, but he has a way of setting off her temper. Gajeel once again has to deal with the fierce anger he harbors in Levy’s name towards Thibault, realizing it drives him to want to kill the man all over again. Levy does her best to ease his pain and the two of them finally come together in a much more intimate way.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 7: Heat

“That poor bastard…” Gray was muttering just under his breath as he stood only feet away, from where two paramedics were now loading an occupied stretcher into the open doors of an ambulance. He snapped his head away, quickly averting his eyes with a groan. After getting another glimpse of the deeply fractured face of the poor soul his partner had mistaken for a dead person at first. He closed his eyes upon hearing the noise of the ambulance doors slamming shut. Letting the air slide out from his throat in an effort to calm his nerves, but nothing could get the horrifying image of what he had just seen, out of his mind.

The memory of coming upon his hunched over partner, as he hovered over the beaten man, bleeding all over the pavement was still freshly nesting in his brain. The shock upon seeing such a sight, had made Gray practically jump back in alarm. He was still fairly new to being a police officer and so he hadn’t ever witnessed something so heinous before. Luckily Elfman’s deep calming voice had filled his ears next, bringing him back to the right mindset. Reminding him that they needed to contact forensics and tape off the area, as this was clearly a murder, or at least it had appeared to be one to them at the time.

Those words had been just the wakeup call Gray needed, as he remembered his police training. This now being the perfect time to put what he had learned to the test. He just hadn’t ever imagined it would be on something as serious as murder, this early on in his officer career. It both terrified and excited him at the same time, as his real goal was to get promoted to detective eventually. This motivation being just what he needed, to help him past his state of shock and to the next step of the process. He threw himself down before the body and was just about to act when a disgusting sound made his form go rigid instead.

Gray stood there, remembering how each muscle in his body began to harden and how a cold chill had raked through him in that moment. The image of the poor soul’s collapsing face was forever
etched into his brain, but he would have gladly kept that memory, if it meant ridding his head of the god-awful sound he had heard the broken man utter next. It had sounded like something between a gurgle and a wheeze, as if the man was choking on his own blood and spit, in order to create words with what was left of his crumbled mouth. And it had been that very sound, that had let Gray and his partner know, that the man before them was not a corpse, but still very much alive.

“He-he-he’s alive!” Gray had stuttered out in disbelief. His words were coming out so breathlessly, it was almost as if his own voice hadn’t said them. He turned to Elfman next, who’s expression matched his own. “Elfman he’s alive!” They both stared at each other for a brief second in shock, allowing just the right amount of time for Gray’s adrenaline to kick into high gear. “Quick! We need to get an ambulance here! NOW!” Gray shouted the order, as he hastily jumped to his feet.

“Wait! Where are you going?!” Elfman questioned his partner.

“I’m getting gloves, I’m gonna try and keep him alive until the paramedics get here!” Gray called back as he marched off like a man on a mission

Gray opened his eyes as the memory of his own voice shouting, vanished from his ears. He could feel each moment of it pulsing through his mind, in rhythm with each beat of his heart. He stared down at his gloved and blood covered hands. The red lights from the sirens were bouncing off of his face.

Everything after that point had just happened so fast, it was almost like a blur of energy. He had tried to do everything he could to keep the shattered man alive, up until the ambulance arrived. Shouting orders to his fellow officers, he could feel his teeth clamping down as he thought about it, and he watched his fingers close up into a tight fist. His hands were shaking with both frustration and nerves, as he feared that all of his efforts might still possibly be in vain. That their victim might still not survive his injuries, even after everything. He began tearing off his bloody white gloves, as if distraught by these thoughts, letting them fall to the ground carelessly.

“Gray?” Gray’s dark eyes glanced up. Matching the navy, almost black irises of his much larger partner Elfman Strauss. Elfman more than towered over Gray in height, the man was quite simply, built like a beast with a huge broad physique. His hair was a bright ashen white, that stood in great contrast with his almost orangey tan skin, the locks standing straight up like snowy spikes. His face consisted of a square, almost rectangular jawline and chin. He also had a long narrow nose, but what was most noticeable about his face, was the long almost stitch like scar that angled from his cheekbone, to just below his right eye. His overall appearance could best be described as that of a true man. Elfman approached Gray, resting his gigantic hand over the smaller officer’s shoulder, practically engulfing it in his palm.

“Ya alright man?” He asked, his voice was deep with worry. Gray brought his now bare clenching fist down and allowed the stiffness he could feel building in his back and shoulders, to give way some.

“Yea…” He answered lowly; glancing down as his fingers freed themselves from the tension he had been holding in them. “Just hoping we got here in time.” He added, his sights landing back on the ambulance as the paramedics were packing up and getting inside. Elfman followed his gaze and watched as well.

“Yea I know what you mean.” He answered idly as the two of them stood among the blare of sirens and pulsing red lights. They both watched without a word as the ambulance made its way out of the parking lot and around the corner. Once it was no longer in sight, Elman turned back towards Gray
as the smaller officer continued to stare off. There was another minute of silence before Gray finally spoke.

“Tell me Elfman... Who do you think did that to him?” He asked.

“Who? More like what? What man is even capable of doing something like that? It was like nothing I’ve ever seen before.”

“Yea…” Gray answered thoughtfully. “It was definitely disturbing... The attacker had to of used something to inflict injuries of that caliber, right?”

“They had to of, but what the hell was it? A bat?”

“Something that packs a lot of force behind it, for sure.” Gray spoke, as his voice started trailing off. His eyes shifted upwards as his hand went up and under his chin. “The whole thing was so… Brutal… Almost makes me think it was personal.”

“No idea…” Elfman chimed in, bewildered by Gray’s theories. “But… There is some good news. We did find out something.”

“Oh yea?” Gray asked, his interest renewed. “Whatcha got?”

“The identity of our now basically faceless, man.” Elfman answered.

“Well, it’s a start. Let’s hear it.” Gray demanded.

“His name is Thibault Winchell. He’s thirty-two years old.” Elfman rattled off. “And luckily there’s at least one bright side to his face being smashed in… Kinda” Elfman hesitated.

“Oh yea, and what’s that?” Gray questioned him, perplexed.

“Well, he wasn’t much of a looker to begin with.” Elfman replied, flashing Gray the man’s ID in his gloved hand. Gray narrowed his eyes and moved his face a bit closer to the plastic card in Elfman’s hand, to get a better look at the small ID photo of their victim.

“Hey... You know what, I know that guy! He hangs out at the casino. You got the ugly part right. You don’t easily forget a face like his, once you’ve seen it.” Gray replied.

“It’s funny you should mention the Casino actually.” Elfman spoke as his eyes shifted down and that was when Gray noticed his partner was holding, what must have been their victim’s wallet. He reached inside, pulling out what looked like a business card, from one of the sleeves and then he brought it up, to show Gray with his gloved hand. “See the name on there?” Gray once again, moved his face in closer. Squinting his eyes to read the tiny black text as he also noticed a tiny almost cat-like, looking hat symbol, on the card. “Banaboster Goodrich, owner of the Twilight Ogre Casino.” Elfman stated the name Gray had just read. Gray folded his arms at that and moved his head back, glancing back up to Elfman with curiosity.

“Well damn, wonder what that could mean? Does he work there, ya think?” Gray asked, just as Elfman started putting the card back into the wallet sleeve.

“I don’t know, but at least we know a little more about our man. Might help us figure out why this happened to him and who did it. Maybe he was a gambler and now he owes Banaboster some money er something.”

“Well you’re not really the maannn to figure that, out, are you?” Came a deep sultry voice from over
Elfman’s shoulder.

“Huh?” Elfman uttered just as he and Gray turned around to see a very short and stout figure standing before them, in a very strange and flamboyant pose. His arms were crossed over his chest, with both sets of his end fingers open, almost like he was some kind of strange super hero. He had long, flowing red hair that almost seemed to sparkle as it parted down his scalp. He had a very obtuse looking head, shaped like a box with a small-cleft chin sticking out of it and some five o’clock shadow. His nose was almost bulbous looking and nearly as short and stout as the rest of him. His eyes were small and black, but emphasized by his extremely angled and angry looking eyebrows. His whole face resembled that of a man always in deep concentration to perfect his poses, as he stood before the two officers in a peculiar position now, dressed in a suit no less.

“Who the hell are you?” Gray questioned in outrage.

“Yea! And who are you sayin’ isn’t a man?!” Elfman bellowed out angrily. “Cause I’ll have you know, you’re lookin at the very best of em’, right here!” He added confidently pointing a thumb at his own barrel-sized chest.

“Ichiya Vandalay Kotobuki, at your service and I am the maannn you are looking for.” Ichiya answered in his richly deep voice. Elfman and Gray both just stared at him with a mixture of disgust and confusion. They both found Ichiya to be incredibly creepy.

“You a man?” Elfman questioned, as he watched Ichiya perform several more poses. Each one making him resemble a fat little ballerina, more than the next. “I doubt it.” Elfman added, as he looked Ichiya over again. “A real man doesn’t… Sparkle… Well… Not like that anyways.” Elfman muttered.

“Wait a minute!” Gray exclaimed. “Kotobuki? Do you mean-?!”

“Ah yes, someone who has heard of me. Detective Kotobuki from Pegasus Blue at your service.” Ichiya spoke with a bow, making Gray nearly slap a hand to his forehead in disbelief.

“No way! The chief mentioned him to me before! This guy is the leading detective at Chief Bob’s station!?” Gray exclaimed again, making Elfman shoot him a doubtful look.

“What? No way. You’ve gotta be joking?” Elfman stated in his low strong voice, now deeply concerned.

“It’s no joke, I promise you. Now are you two the officers, that filled out the report on my case or not?” Ichiya was just asking when another voice was heard.

“Master Ichiya! You made it!” It was the voice of Hibiki. The young man Gray had caught flirting with Cana earlier, when he was supposed to have been checking on the blood splatters found in the women’s restroom.

“Master?” Gray repeated Hibiki’s word, with great bewilderment as he watched the young man approach Ichiya with a large smile on his face and two gloved hands.

“Glad you’re here.” Hibiki added as he looked down at his far shorter superior.

“Ahh Hibiki, my forensics man. Can you show me what you have found?” Ichiya asked.

“Sure thing boss, right this way!” Hibiki chimed, as Ichya began to follow him.

“Boss?” Gray repeated Hibiki’s second title for Ichiya, as he and Elfman followed the pair with their
eyes, in disbelief.

“Tell me Sir, will Ren and Eve be coming down too?” Hibiki questioned.

“Yes, they’re consulting with me on this case. They should be joining us momentarily, maaannnn.” Ichiya’s thick voice flowed out.

“Ah that’s good news chief.” Hibiki replied in his boyish, yet confident tone.

“How many different titles does that idiot, give the guy?” Gray muttered as he watched them

“I’m just trying to understand how that fruitcake, is their leading detective.” Elfman mumbled in response to Gray. “Glad we’re not stationed in that nut job of a department.” He added quietly as they watched Ichiya and Hibiki head towards the site, where they had found their victim.

“Oh and you two!” Came Ichiya’s voice one last time to Gray and Elfman, who immediately perked up in attention. “Don’t go anywhere, as I’m going to have questions for the two of you.” He spoke, before turning back around to walk off with Hibiki. Gray and Elfman watched them both for a moment longer, until they were sure the two other men were out of earshot and then they both sighed.

“How come I have this sinking feeling that dealing with those guys is gonna make this whole process, a lot more painful?” Elfman questioned.

“Yea, no kidding.” Gray replied as he ran a hand through his dark hair. “And I told Cana we would take her home.”

“Ya think she’s still in there?” Elfman asked.

“Yea, where else would she be? She can’t go anywhere, but I wouldn’t be surprised if she was passed out by now.” Gray answered as he folded his arms, thinking for a moment. “Maybe you can still take her in the squad car and I can wait here with twinkle toes and pretty boy. Answer any of their questions and handle the paperwork stuff. Tell them what we know and what evidence we’ve gathered.”

“Ya think they’d go for that?” Elfman asked, not wanting to stay there and endure the strange detective, or his officer’s, any longer than he had to.

“Don’t see why not. Ya might just have to come get me later at the station, because they’re probably going to have to take me back with them.” Gray stated.

“Sounds like a plan to me.” Elfman answered, as he looked his partner over with a grateful smile. Gray smirked back, his eyebrows lowering, if dealing with these idiots is all I have to do, in order to get some actual experience, then it’s totally worth it. Grays’s thoughts spoke as his smirk widened into a full out grin. He was eager with what was to come. Besides... I want to know who did this…

“Try to be still Gajeel.” Came Levy’s voice, scolding the large monstrous man as if he were nothing, but a misbehaving child.

“I’m trying…” Gajeel growled back, his tone clearly full of impatience. He was sitting up, with his back propped up against the headboard of Levy’s bed, his legs outreached across the mattress. Boxer shorts and black T-shirt on, but pants still off as Levy hunched over him, from her spot in a computer chair beside the bed.
Her hair was tied up and out of her face, her glasses on as her head leaned in close to the spot of his wound. Her large eyes were full of concentration, as she showed no signs of looking away from the place where her tiny hands were working on stitching his injury closed, carefully. And all Gajeel could do was sit there and wait for her to finish the job.

The whole situation would have been rather boring for him if it wasn’t for the free rein he now had to look over her, without her knowing. It actually surprised him how much entertainment he got out of watching the different facial expressions Levy would make beneath her glasses as she worked. It was oddly mesmerizing as if she wasn’t sure about anything she was doing and yet she was still determined to get through it all.

Once he had his fill of that, his eyes would then begin the obvious path down her body, by first taking in the full sway of her naked neck. He could actually appreciate it now that it was no longer hidden from view by her normally wild blue strands. The same could be said for her revealed shoulders and the unmarred milky, white skin that she was crafted in. Followed closely by the defined line of her delicate collarbone, before finally settling on the small bit of cleavage that dipped out from her little black dress, as she leaned in over his thigh. This spot basically being the last stop before his eyes would then shoot back up to her face, to begin the cycle all over again. Like a child running to the back of the line, of the same roller coaster again and again, just so they could ride the first hill over. This treading of his line of sight, making a descent in much the same fashion as his blood, which made this whole situation a bit tough for him to endure without becoming visibly excited, considering his current ‘pants off’ situation. Luckily for Gajeel though, he had at least one little constant distraction, that was keeping him level headed throughout the whole ordeal.

“Urgghh…” He groaned in pain, his sights ripping away from Levy as his head snapped up and out in the direction of her window. The muscles in his one arm went very tight. His fingers squeezing into a fist that he lightly pounded into the wall beside her bed as he felt the great sting, of one of Levy’s tools in his wound. His head hung down, as the pain moved through him, his eyes going closed as he clenched his jaw.

“Gajeel…” Levy’s voice warned, as this wasn’t the first time he had done this. Actually, this had basically been his way of eating back the pain of her stitching him up, since she had started. “Please… try… I know it hurts, but this is really difficult.”

“I know…” Gajeel panted out as he tried to ease the tensing muscles in his leg. He really was trying to be still and in truth he was doing a much better job than most would be in such a situation, but every time he felt that needle. He just couldn’t seem to stop the spasm, that moved through his leg, causing a slight flinch in the muscles right where she was trying to suture his injury. “I’m sorry shrimp.” This apology earned him her eyes as she looked up at him sympathetically.

Now that she had started doing this, she didn’t want to stop, but she felt awful for putting him through it. And she was actually astounded by how well he was handling it, despite her reprimands of him. Most people would have probably been made nauseated by what she was doing to him. If they could even manage to stay conscious through it, that is, but not Gajeel. His tolerance for pain was really something remarkable. If Levy didn’t know any better, she would almost think that his flesh was made of something entirely different than everyone else’s.

“No, I guess I’m the one who should be sorry… You’re actually handling this amazingly. I’m just…” She began as she glanced down. She was dipping the end of her tweezers into a bowl of solution that she had made, and set on the table right next to her. She sighed with great worry, before continuing. “Well… I’m not exactly a professional.” She finished, bringing her hand back up as she leaned in once again, to continue working. Her expression and hunched over posture was wielding her concern visibly enough for even Gajeel to notice it.
“But you’ve done this before.” Gajeel stated. “Ain’t that enough?” He questioned.

“How much experience do you think I have Gajeel?” Levy asked, glancing up at him briefly, before glancing back down. “I’ve only done this a handful of times and none of those times were anything like this.” She replied just as she heard Gajeel’s fist thud the wall again, his face cringing. He let out a small hissing sound this time, before setting her back in his sights, doing his best to ignore the agony she was causing him.

“What do ya mean? Ya don’t do this every day?” He asked next, a weak smirk forming on his face, as he looked at her through the pain.

“Ha very funny…” Levy answered without looking up, her hands still moving. “No…” She paused before continuing, “What I mean is I’ve never tried to suture a puncture wound in my own home, like some kind of crazy garage surgeon or something... Not only is the procedure difficult enough for someone like me, but we also don’t have any of the amenities a hospital would have, which makes me worry about infection. Then to top it all off, the only bit of experience I do have is from interning last summer. I mean honestly…” She paused to look back up at him again. “I’m not sure I should even be doing this.” She stated meeting his stare, but Gajeel just shrugged her off.

“We’ve already gone over this. It’ll be fine.” He stated looking away.

“Yea, you keep telling me that.” Levy answered looking back down. “I just wish I could believe you…” She stated softly, before continuing more loudly. “And I really hope…” She began to say as she felt Gajeel flinch again, his head hanging as another small groan escaped his throat. “You’re not going to be eating those words later.” She finished, but was surprised when she heard a quiet, but labored laugh coming from him. Levy watched as his head shifted back up so he could look at her. He had a pain-ridden expression over his face, but a large grin exposing his fangs nonetheless.

“The only ‘words’ I’ll be eatin’ are yours. I mean C’mon shrimp. Do I really seem like the regretful type to you?” He then asked, matching Levy’s eyes with his own. There was a brief pause as the two of them stared at one another, before Levy finally spoke.

“No…” She answered glancing back down at his wound, her hands beginning to work on threading again. Her inner voice however, was speaking a different story from her outside one.

But you are Gajeel... She thought, her eyebrows lowering as she remembered his heartfelt apology to her earlier. When he was still blaming himself for what had transpired between her and Thibault. More than you’d like me to believe, at least... She thought, as she heard him groaning underneath her again.

“So…” She began. “What would you call Daphne then?” She suddenly found herself asking, with absolutely no thought behind it. Levy’s eyes widened at her own words as soon as they left her mouth. Her own shock evident, that she should bring up her foremost mentioned roommate once again without meaning too.

What the hell Levy?! She couldn’t help, but think as she blinked and jerked her head just ever so slightly out of pure disbelief of her own actions. She then kept her eyes glued downward on Gajeel’s wound, too afraid to chance the look back up at him, after what she had just blurted out. Where did that come from? She was questioning herself still, dumbfounded by it.

“Who?” Came Gajeel’s response in genuine confusion. His tone was so genuine in fact, that it actually made Levy chance the glance back up at him anyways. Just so she could send him a very pointed glare, as if questioning his intelligence.
“Really?” She uttered out skeptically with a raised eyebrow, as she looked over his puzzled face. “You forgot already?!”

“Oi, the roommate?!” He exclaimed questioningly, as if surprised after catching her stare.

“She…?” Levy mumbled. Looking back down quickly, as she knew it was starting to dawn on him what exactly she was asking him. He folded his arms as he noticed her purposely avoid looking at him, a smirk growing on his lips.

“Coulda sworn you told me not to bring that whole thing up again.” He stated arrogantly, Levy wasn’t looking at him, but she could hear it in his voice.

“Yea…?” Levy replied, still refusing to look back up, as she worked.

“So?? Urghh…” Gajeel started, but he was cut off as his head jerked upwards. His one fist was banging into the wall again, as he let out another loud groan. “S-So.” He began with another labored breath. “What the fuck!?? That’s what.” He finally managed to get out, his voice riddled in pain.

“I told you, not to bring it up.” Levy snapped. Her head going up so that she could meet his face with eyes blazing into him, through her glasses. His expression was no longer arrogant, as the pain was just too much in the way for the moment. “I didn’t say I couldn’t bring it up.” She finished defiantly as her eyes bored into him, making Gajeel turn his head away.

“Actually, what I think you said was, that you didn’t wanna be reminded of that night at all.” He chimed in, raising a studded brow as he looked back at her with a weak grin. Levy’s head went back down at that. Looking away from his face and back down to his wound instead. She could feel a slight warmth gathering in her cheeks, brought on by the unusual smile he had just given her.

“What…?” She uttered out softly.

“I was answering your question.” He stated. “I can’t.” He shrugged. “I can’t regret that night.” Levy quickly glanced down, just as the words had left Gajeel’s mouth. Her heart suddenly feeling hollowed out by the answer. Her eyes stared down at her now still hands, as they held the tools in place, before gliding over each black stitch she had embedded into his dark skin. She couldn’t bring herself to move or think for those few seconds, as she felt her throat dry up of all speech. Her mind was caught in a state of suspense, before Gajeel’s voice resounded into her ears once again.

“Not after I got to see you again, the next morning.”
Levy looked back up at him slowly, her mouth falling open this time. There was a long pause as they both stared at one another. The hollowness she had just felt in her heart, was twisting uncomfortably, making her feel almost weak for a second. Her face grew warm again, as a soft shade of pink came over her cheeks, making Gajeel send her that same strange grin once more, almost as if he was genuinely pleased.

What the heck was going on here? She had no idea, nor had she anything to say to him in that moment. She didn’t know if Gajeel was just feeding her another one of his lines or not, but if he was… This one was significantly better than all of his other ones. She quickly glanced back down. Her embarrassment was beginning to show, as she hadn’t said anything and Gajeel just continued to grin at her, as if amused by it.

“Shut up.” She finally mumbled. Leaning back in, to continue her task with the tiniest of smiles appearing over her lips. “You’re so full of it.” She added quietly.

Gajeel watched her smiling face, up until the point that he felt her needle in his wound again. Then he was wincing instead, but he still managed to somehow hold onto the remnants of his grin. He couldn’t help it, that reaction from her, had just made him so pleased in a way, that he couldn’t explain. As if he somehow knew he had moved her inside by admitting that he had wanted to see her again, after their first meeting and Levy just didn’t know how to handle it. She was normally so clever with her words, so leaving her speechless felt like quite the accomplishment to Gajeel.

“Yea…” He groaned as he let loose another tiny labored laugh. “Gi Hi…I know. Always sayin’ something, right?” He questioned her jokingly for reassurance.

“Always…” She answered, the tiny smile still gracing her features.

Gajeel turned away from her just as their conversation ended. He was thinking to himself with his smile still intact, as he took the opportunity to look around her room during the comfortable silence. The quietness was allowing his mind peace enough, to delve into other areas it probably had no business being in, as he tried his best to ignore each wave of pain that came over him.

Levy’s apartment was so messy, what with the hordes of books all over the place. It made him remember how embarrassed she was when they had first walked in, as she had mentioned being too busy to clean up and something about never having company over as well. His head turned back so that he could look her over once again, as she continued to focus in, on stitching him up. His mind was thinking back to the question she had just asked him about her roommate, as his eyes played over every detail of her, that he enjoyed looking at slowly. He could feel his thoughts piecing something new together as he did this, until it finally registered into a full, complete coherent thought in his thick head. Levy was single.

This of course wasn’t something Gajeel had just figured out, but at the same time it wasn’t anything he had ever really given serious consideration before either. Normally he just glossed over details like that, because he didn’t really care whether the girl he was with at the time, actually had a boyfriend or not. Especially considering he rarely ever saw them again, but now as he sat there on Levy’s twin sized bed. Inside her messy apartment, with no pants on and her tiny frame bent over his lower half... He was suddenly finding it very difficult to not think about for once.

Gajeel quickly glanced up and away from her, his head swiveling in the direction of her front door instead. It was pretty clear that Levy lived in the studio alone and so he knew he didn’t need to worry about someone else barging in to discover the two of them there, as they were. Let alone some overprotective jealous boyfriend ready to punch him out, for trying to steal her away. Not that he would be afraid if she did have one anyways. He was pretty confident in his ability to kick just about anyone’s ass, bum leg be damned.
Steal her away? His mind questioned, going back to the previous sentiment. A hand was going up to
his forehead, over the confusion of his own thoughts. What the hell is wrong with me? He wondered
as he looked towards Levy again, running that hand through his hair, but the longer he stared at her
the less he understood.

How could Levy of all people, really be single? She was so beautiful and smart. One of the smartest
people he had ever met in fact. She was also hardworking and down to earth, kind hearted... She
really was, quite extraordinary. This girl had everything going for her. Everything any guy with half
a brain should want and more, so how was it, that she didn’t already have someone in her life? In
fact… His head went back up, looking around the messy room once more. When was the last time
she had anyone at all? And it was with that question that Gajeel’s mind had flowed effortlessly back
into the gutter, just as smoothly as the rain. The subject of sex, never seeming to be a stretch where
Levy was concerned, as he was slowly realizing that she was more than likely not having any.

The more Gajeel thought about it though, the more it actually made a lot of sense. Despite the
fantasies, he had played out about her. The reality being that Levy’s life was incredibly busy; hell, it
was half of the reason why he was always teasing her about never having any fun. He also knew she
didn’t just go around sleeping with random men, or at least he was pretty damn sure she didn’t.
Seeing as she had resisted him on numerous occasions. All of that, coupled with the way she had
acted after his night with her roommate, just proved to him that, that life style was not applicable to
Levy’s character. Add it all up, with the state of her apartment and what she had said to him earlier
about company, along with the settle desperation he sometimes sensed coming from her and there
was his answer. Levy was in midst of what Gajeel imagined to be a very long dry spell, or at least
that was what he suspected.

He looked back up at her, a smirk forming on his face, but she didn’t take notice as she was still
concentrating too heavily on the task of stitching him up. His mouth opened as if he was about to say
something, when another wave of pain moved through him, making him groan rather than speak. His
fist was clenching once again.

“You okay?” Levy questioned as she looked up at him. He had been rather quiet through her last
few sutures, up until that last one, so that was why she had decided to ask.

“Yea…” He answered with his one eye closed and the other on her. He was still holding onto that
same mischievous smirk and Levy most definitely noticed it this time.

“What’s that look for?” She asked glancing back down.

“Nothin… Just thinkin’ bout something is all…” Gajeel replied nonchalantly.

“Oh yea…?” Levy replied almost absent-mindedly. “What’s that?” Gajeel’s eyes opened as he
thought to himself. Now he could very well leave it be and not ask her what it was, that he had been
guessing at, but that just wouldn’t be any fun, now would it? Not with the way she tended to get all
riled up over the topic. He did have to remind himself, that right now during this moment, she had
the power to put him through an incredible amount of pain.

Worth it, his thoughts chimed, as his smirk grew into a full out grin. He then quickly tried to hide it,
before beginning to speak again.

“So…” He began almost awkwardly, but really, he was only doing it, in an effort to remain calm
through his question. “When was, the last time you had someone sleep over here, huh? Urrghhh!” He
asked blatantly, before letting out another loud groan as his eyes slammed shut.

Levy’s hand had jerked up violently by accident. A result of being completely thrown off kilter by
his question and it had hurt Gajeel… Badly. He opened his eyes to find her not moving, as if frozen in place, with her eyes glued downwards. His mouth fell open in surprise as he stared at her; there was brief pause, before her head whipped up, her angry glare meeting his unsuspecting one.

“What the hell?! What kind of a question is that?!” She snapped with disbelief. Gajeel’s eyes widened from her sudden rage for about a second, before his brow eased back some.

“Well, that sure is some kind of reaction… What? Did I hit a nerve er somethin’? Has it been a while for ya?” He asked clearly amused by her outrage. His smirk was growing wide and making him appear very smug, as if he knew he was right.

“What?! N-no! It’s just! Who asks that kinda thing!?” She exclaimed clearly getting flustered as her face was beginning to flush red.

“Aw C’mon. I thought it was fair considerin I’ll be sleepin’ over here tonight.” He answered. Levy’s eyes narrowed on him in frustration. He was always playing games with her like this and even though she knew that to be the case, she couldn’t stop herself from becoming completely irritated. She was just fed up with him.

“Don’t play innocent with me!” She exclaimed. “I know you better than that Gajeel. I know what you’re really asking me.” She stated, her tone calming, but her voice was stern as if to imply that she couldn’t be fooled.

“Yea okay, fine.” He stated admitting his true intentions with little to no fight and a shrug. “Question still stands though. When was the last time for you? I’ll tell you mine if you tell me yours.”

Gajeel watched as Levy’s face flushed a vibrant color of red, in either anger or embarrassment? He wasn’t quite sure at first, but his question was answered seconds later when her head whipped back down. Her hands beginning to sew his wound back up at record-breaking speed, allowing him zero time to even brace himself for the oncoming pain of her needle.

“Gahhh!!! What the hell woman?!” He cried out in agony as her hands continued to work furiously.

“I can’t believe you…” She murmured in great anger as her eyes stared down at his wound like it was something she hated. “Like it’s any of YOUR business!” She snapped loud enough for him to hear this time, as he began to moan from all of the pain. His fist was forming once again as he began to jolt it at his side with each coming wave he was now enduring.

Levy didn’t know why she was so maddened by the question Gajeel had just asked her. It was just Gajeel, being Gajeel, as usual, but something about it still struck a chord within her. Maybe, because she hadn’t yet had anyone ‘sleep over’, since she had started living in the tiny, beat up studio apartment. This was all just another harsh reminder of how long it had been for her since she had been with anyone, both physically and emotionally.

“Stay still damn it! I’m almost done!” She yelled, all patience out the window.

“Well, fuck Levy! I’m trying!” He shouted back angrily as well. He knew he had brought up a sore subject considering how upset she was. That was most definitely clear. So maybe he should have just let his question remain unanswered, but… Once again this was Levy he was dealing with and Gajeel always struggled with his restraint around her.

Minutes later Gajeel’s shouting had died down and they were left with nothing, but an awkward silence as Levy glared down, still clearly pissed off. Her hands were moving at a more rapid pace than they had yet to that whole night, as if she no longer cared whether she was hurting him or not.
and she just wanted to be done with it all.

Gajeel on the other hand was now facing the wall. His face cringing as he endured the burn of Levy’s anger through her treatment. He made sure to stay quiet though, resisting the urge to groan, by instead just letting his hand rest up against the wall. His shoulders were severely tight and his fingers were curling into each other like claws as he pressed them up against the drywall of her apartment. His body stiffening intensely with each bound of slicing pain that shot through him, in a desperate attempt to brace for it.

Levy of course, noticed how Gajeel was sitting, but was trying like high hell to ignore him out of pure spite. How was it, that after everything that had just happened, he could still manage to make her feel this way? She was so angry and infuriated with him as she stared down at where her fingers were threading. She only had about four more stitches to go. And yet… She still felt bad about it all as well…

The guilt was starting to seep in, as she remembered why they were here. She could feel her hands slowing up as she neared the last few stitches. She watched as the muscles in Gajeel’s leg eased. She had given him a moment to breathe. She didn’t know how he always managed to push her to the point of rage. Nobody had ever done that to her like he did, but there was just no explaining it. She was normally so calm and level headed, but not with Gajeel around.

Levy watched her tweezers move as she tugged the last stitch she had planned on making through Gajeel’s skin. Finishing the tiny suture as neatly as she possibly could. She then let out a long breath, as she pushed herself up into a more upright position. Gajeel heard her sigh and felt her move away from him. His head turned away from the wall to look back at her, but he said nothing as he thought she might still be upset. She locked eyes with him and that was when he noticed that she was eyeing him with an annoyed expression, but she didn’t appear to be as angry, as she had been just minutes ago.

“All done.” She spoke, Gajeel looked down at the wound in amazement. Wondering if it was safe enough for him to respond to her, without getting his head bitten off.

“Oh yea?” Was all he managed to choke out. Earning him another sigh as Levy dropped her stitching tools into the bowl of solution carelessly, making a small splash.

“Yes.” She replied curtly, as she grabbed the bowl and stood up without looking at him. Gajeel’s eyes were on her as she began to turn away and he found himself reaching out.

“Wait, where are you goin?” He asked hastily, but Levy showed no signs of acknowledging him, as she headed towards the bathroom.

“I’m going to get you some ice and something to cover those stitches up.” She answered, just before disappearing into the bathroom.

Gajeel sat there watching the spot she had just vanished from like an idiot, not knowing what to do to quell her anger this time. He finally looked away, his head shifting to the side when he noticed the little bedside table that was within his reach. There on it, was another unused and clean cloth, alongside the dirty bloodied one Levy had used for him and some hydrogen peroxide or something. He wasn’t exactly sure what it was; all he knew was that Levy had used it to initially clean his wound before stitching him up.

Upon noticing this, an idea struck him just as Levy came back into the room. The bowl she had been holding was gone now, but in its place, she seemed to be carrying some medical tape, a bandage roll and a small cotton looking pad. She was approaching her fridge now, still refusing to look his way as
he watched her steadily. She opened the door of its freezer and grabbed a small ice pack from the
top, before turning back his way. She approached the bed still without a word, standing before him
as he looked up at her. Her arm outstretched towards him, as she offered him the ice pack in her one
hand.

“Here.” Was all she said, making Gajeel glance down at it, before he cautiously took it from her.
Almost as if he had no idea what it was. Once the ice pack was out of Levy’s hands, she dropped
back down into the chair beside the bed.

Gajeel was sitting there, staring at the cold pack in his hands like he couldn’t make heads or tails of
it. Levy was trying not to notice, but she found his blatant act of ignorance a bit difficult to ignore, as
it annoyed her how dense he was being. She began to unwrap the bandage she was holding a little,
before commenting.

“Put it over the surrounding muscles…” She finally stated, her voice coming out with an upward
inflection, as if it was obvious. “It should help with the swelling and pain.” She added impatiently.

“Oh, yea…” Gajeel answered as he gently rested the pack over the skin on top of his leg, just above
the spot of Levy’s sutures. He kept his hand rested over it, to keep it in place as Levy leaned down
and over him again. He then began to watch as Levy’s finger gently pressed the small cotton square
over his stitches, before taking the bandage roll around his leg and over the top of it. Making the
strands taut, to hold the cotton in place. Then lastly, she wrapped the strange textured tape over top
of the bandages, as a way to tighten them and keep the whole thing firmly in place over his stitches,
in an attempt to keep them safe.

“There.” She stated, sitting upright again and looking down at her handy work, but Gajeel didn’t
bother to inspect the wrap job and instead just kept his eye over her face. Levy must have noticed as
she finally glanced up at him, meeting his eyes with her own. “How does it feel? Is that helping at
all?” She asked pointing to his ice pack; her tone was all business like. This made Gajeel lower his
eyes off of her and down to the ice pack, as his hand lifted up and over it slightly in a small gesture
towards her.

“Oh yea… sure.” He answered quickly. In truth, he hadn’t really been paying much attention to the
amount of pain he was experiencing once she had stopped stitching him. He was too distracted by
her to do that. Levy rose up out of her chair with one last strict glance his way, her head leaning in
towards his some, as she threw a pointing finger in his face.

“Good. Now you listen to me.” She commanded, her voice was quiet, but adamant. Gajeel’s eyes
widened, as they stared at the finger now practically touching his nose. “Don’t you dare mess with
those stitches and don’t get them wet either.” She warned. “Don’t try and take them out. Don’t do
anything stupid. When they’re ready to go, you come to me.” She ordered, before whipping around
to walk away, but she wasn’t able to get far.

“Wait!” Came Gajeel’s voice, just as quickly as his grip on her. His arm had gone reaching out, his
hand wrapping around her forearm before she was able to get away. Levy paused, locked in his
clutches, her head turning towards him with a greatly irritated expression beginning to form on her
face. “Where are you going?” Gajeel asked once she was looking at him, without letting her go.

“Let go Gajeel!” She snapped, but not only did he not listen, his grasp on her actually tightened some
as he felt her beginning to shift her arm back and forth as a means to escape.

“Where…” He put great emphasize on the word this time, before continuing with his eyes on her.
“Are you going?” He finished, making sure to annunciate each word.
“Does it matter?! Let go!” Levy answered, moving her arm up some, but Gajeel just kept his hold on her. In truth, she wasn’t really fighting him all that hard, because she knew she wouldn’t truly be able to get away until he let her. She had more than already learned that about him, after all of their previous encounters. “Gajeel!” She shouted, as his arm just moved up with hers, staying firmly clasped around her thin forearm. Gajeel’s brow lowered, as his eyes became very serious.

“Answer my question.” He spoke. His voice was deep, as he was no longer asking her, but demanding.

“To bed!” She finally shouted back in her frustration. She no longer cared that he had ten times the amount of strength in his one hand, versus her whole body, because he was no longer a threat. That fear she had once had of him was all, but gone.

“And where the hell is that, huh? Seein’ as I’m on it!” Gajeel hollered back as Levy continued to move her arm up and down, as if that was somehow helping her get away. “No.” He stated, tightening his grip on her even further as he began to drag her in towards him.

“Hey!” Levy shouted, trying not to be pulled any closer to the bed. “What the hell are you doing Gajeel?!” She yelled out, as he brought her against the mattress.

“Calm down.” He replied. His tone easing some, as he brought her near him. “And just sit yer fine ass down.” He finished, pulling her down so that she was forced to sit on the edge of the mattress next to him, with her legs hanging off of the side.

He felt some slight pain arise into one huffing breath as Levy just lightly brushed passed the spot of his sutures. Part of her bottom half was now flushed up against the side of his thigh, as she sat beside his outstretched legs on the bed. He was still lightly holding onto her forearm as she turned to look at him, her face reddened. She did not look pleased with him by any means. If anything, Gajeel could see her teeth clamped down with frustration.

“There.” He spoke, letting her go as she stared daggers at him. Both of his hands were coming up, as he set aside his ice pack. “That ain’t so bad, right?” He questioned.

“Why am I here Gajeel?” She demanded in great annoyance. “I already told you that I’m not sleeping with you, so I hope you’re not banking on us sharing this bed tonight, because that is most definitely not happening!” She explained, ready for a fight.

“No.” Gajeel stated, shaking his head. “It ain’t like that.” He added. “No games this time.” He spoke as his hands began to move up towards her, reaching for her face, but Levy was quickly moving her head back and away from him.

“Hey-W-what are you-!?” She exclaimed as his hands followed her, finally grabbing onto either side of her glasses, before she could get any further.

Levy paused, as she finally realized what it was that he was doing and then Gajeel slowly and gently slid the glasses right off of her face. She sat there staring at him with great alarm and her mouth agape, not knowing what to make of this strange action. Meanwhile Gajeel reached down, setting the glasses on the table next to him, before looking back up at her with a lop-sided smirk. Thinking about how at least now, she was being still.

“You’ve helped me tonight.” He began. “Now it’s my turn to help you.” He finished, before moving again.

Levy’s brow pushed together in great confusion as she watched Gajeel reach over and pick up the
unused cloth on her bedside table, dampening it with the hydrogen peroxide. Then he set the bottle back down and shifted his head back up towards her with the cloth ready in his one hand.

“What-re you… doing?” She questioned not quite grasping this whole concept just yet.

“C’mere.” He gestured with his free hand, before setting the cloth down beside himself on the mattress, so he could bring the second hand up as well. “You cleaned my wound up, I’m gonna clean yours.” He explained, his hands open and offering.

“Uhhh…” She started.

“It’ll be fine.” He told her reassuringly, before she could actually say anything. “I’m not gonna try anything.” He then added with a light sigh as he noted her hesitation to move any closer to him.

Levy watched him for a moment, his eyes were deadlocked to hers and he showed no hints of a smirk or grin on his face. If anything, he actually looked completely sincere. His two hands were still reached up towards her, as he waited patiently for her to make the first move.

She quickly glanced down, feeling a slight pressure in her chest. Her own hands were sitting in her lap, fiddling together nervously as she considered what he was saying. In truth, she did still have a huge gash on the side of her head, that she had yet to deal with. She was also well aware of how much easier it would be, to have someone else look at it for her, rather than trying to clean it up herself, because of where it was located at on her face. And lastly, she was exhausted… If Gajeel hadn’t said anything, it was quite possible she would have just fallen asleep without cleaning it at all, as she had almost forgotten about it entirely while so wrapped up in his injury.

“You promise?” She questioned, looking up at him again cautiously. Gajeel rolled his eyes a bit at this. His pride was a bit wounded by how adamant she was being about wanting nothing to do with him.

“I told ya so, didn’t I? I’m not about to start lyin’ to ya now.” He said, his steady gaze still on her, with no smiles or jokes hidden in his features. Levy glanced down one more time, taking a short shaky breath before finally answering him.

“Okay…” She breathed out nervously with a sigh and a tiny nod. Then finally she began to inch her way over hesitantly, along the mattress. Her head looking elsewhere, avoiding his eyes as she neared him.

Gajeel leaned his upper body forwards, in an effort to meet her part ways. His arms were open and stretched out towards her welcomingly. Until she was finally within reach of his hands, but he made sure to pause before touching her. Letting his fingers just hover around her form for a few seconds. She had been so weary of him, that he didn’t want to do anything too sudden, out of fear that he might scare her away, almost like she was a bird.

“All right…” He spoke softly. His eyes did a very quick skim of her body, from the bottom up, before finally landing on the nasty cut engraved into the side of her head. “Now… Just, take it easy.” He told her softly upon noticing her troubled expression, as his one hand started closing the distance to her cheek cautiously.

Levy closed her eyes upon feeling his large hand make contact with the uninjured side of her face. She opened them again after feeling some slight pressure from his palm as he brushed his fingers over her skin, automatically causing her head to shift slightly. His other hand was now reaching up, with his fingers out as they neared her forehead. Levy could feel herself bracing as she felt the tip of his fingers lightly glide along her hairline, taking the loose strands of hair that hung by her face with
them, until they were pushed back and neatly tucked away behind her ear. He then rested the palm of that hand, against the side of her neck, his fingers wrapping around the back and his thumb going up into the corner of her jaw line. His warmth was engulfing most of her face and neck, as he rested his hands against her.

All of his movements were slow, but full of intent as he handled her lightly. Trying to be gentle enough, so she wouldn't think he was just doing this all as a way to get her blood pumping and yet... Oddly enough, his not trying to make her feel anything was making her feel something and she didn’t know why. Something about Gajeel trying to be so virtuous around her for once, was endearing and so she found herself just moving in sync with his hands gracefully. Her eyes entranced to his face as she watched his stare harden on the place of her injury.

“All right... Let’s see it now...” He huffed out quietly, just as Levy could feel his thumb lightly pushing her jaw up, so that her chin lifted. Her head angled up with his movements, as his other hand still cradled the other side of her face. She watched him from the corner of her eye, as Gajeel moved his face in, closer to hers. His eyes were narrowing in on the cut. “Hmm...” He spoke right into her ear, “Doesn’t look as bad as I thought it would up close... But Still...” He paused. “Not pretty... Fucking bastard...” He muttered in a low growl as if still greatly angered by Thibault.

Levy was quiet, as she could feel his breath going against her face each time he spoke, until finally he moved his head back. Followed closely by his hands, the contact from them was disappearing as they slid off of her gently. She moved her head back down to look at him. He was reaching for the cloth he had rested on the edge of the mattress beside him.

“Tell me...” He began as Levy watched him. “Did you pass out when he did that to you?” He asked, his eyes were still narrowed in spite as he readied the cloth in his hand.

“Uh...” Levy began, straining to think as Gajeel’s hands were back up. The one pressing itself back into place on the uninjured side of her face again. The other was now holding the cloth and hovering just above her cut, but he seemed to be waiting again.

“Here.” He began, his hand sliding back some, angling her head with it, as he brushed his palm across her cheek. “Keep yer head like that.” He ordered, as now he could actually see the whole injury.

“Oh okay...” She replied awkwardly as she felt his warm thumb sway across her cheek lightly. It was so strange for her to now be the one receiving treatment from him and she didn’t know how to act. Part of her was in a state of shock, while the other part was in a state of awe and all of it was making it hard for her to think straight. “Um...” She began trying to get back to the question at hand. “I don’t think so...” She started, trying her best to remember what all had happened during the moment Thibault had slammed her head against the toilet. Everything had been so confusing after the blow, that she wasn’t entirely sure she could. “It’s hard to remember...” She answered softly just as she felt Gajeel press the wet cloth up against her head, near her temple right where the spot of pain was. She could smell the fumes of the hydrogen peroxide as it burned and bit at her torn skin.

Gajeel watched as she began to wince with the eye on that side of her face, so he tried his best to wipe the dry blood off as carefully as possible.

“I was so disoriented from the whole thing.” Levy continued, her eyes going downwards as she tried her best to ignore the pain. Gajeel’s lips pulled into a deep frown after hearing her say that. His mind’s eye was beginning to picture the way she had looked when he had found her, after charging into the bathroom stall that night.

“Did he clock you, Levy?” Gajeel asked. His tone was very grim as Levy felt the fingers of his one
hand, tense up on her cheek a little.

“No…” She answered, at least this part of it she did remember. “He slammed my head into the side of the toilet.” She added and with that she felt Gajeel’s hand stop moving abruptly. Her eyes shifted back up in his direction, as he sat there staring off, almost like he was looking into nothing. Then his eyes shifted downwards for a brief second, before glancing back up. His hands continued moving again, as Levy felt the cloth stinging her once more. The dry blood was slowly lifting and coming clean from her skin and onto the cloth.

“You didn’t look very with it, when I found you.” He stated darkly. Levy’s eyes moved off of him and up towards the ceiling.

“I suppose it’s entirely possible that I was knocked out for a minute or two. I’m really not sure though…” She told him “I think… Thibault said something about preferring I be awake… So, he might not have slammed me as hard as he could have…” She spoke, the words just free flowing from her mouth without much thought, as she was far too busy trying to remember what had happened.

“Awake…?” Gajeel repeated Levy’s word, as she felt him not only stop using the cloth this time, but she could also feel the one hand he had against her, beginning to tremble. Levy’s eyes widened and shifted down towards him, just as she felt that same hand now beginning to slide down her cheek as if he could no longer summon the will power to hold it up anymore.

Gajeel sat there beside himself in anger, as the image of Levy’s bloodied face echoed through his mind. The way her half-opened eyes had landed on him during that moment, so helpless and unaware, left him reeling. Her dress recklessly pulled up, revealing her lower half to that disgusting rat Thibault. She had been collapsed into a heap, on the dirty bathroom floor. His ugly face and elongated body towering over her tiny frame as he cascaded her in the shell of his obnoxious shadow. He had her horded away, almost like she was a piece of scrap meat for his nest, that was until Gajeel had jerked him off of her by the back of his shirt. Lifting his lanky body into the air and throwing him against the wall, then quickly following up with a punch to his loathsome face. The blow had been so hard, that blood had splattered across the tiled walls of the bathroom, before Thibault had collapsed into a sitting position on the ground.

The memory of it all, was scorching into the side of Gajeel’s skull like a hot brand. Leaving its mark on him forever. Making him feel so physically ill that he felt like retching. He was so haunted by the visual state he had discovered Levy in and the worse part was that there was no cure for the deep seeded anger that ripped through him whilst he relived it all. Not even after the way he had ruthlessly stomped the man responsible down in the parking lot, like the diseased rodent that he was.

“Gajeel?” Levy questioned as she turned back towards him. His head was bowed in defeat. His shoulders upright, as his body was quivering from rage. His eyes were sealed shut. His brow was mangled and low, as his hand dropped down and away from her face, only to land on her shoulder. He looked so distraught that Levy actually began to worry and reach out for him. Her one hand came up, taking hold of the bicep that belong to his outstretched arm.

“Gajeel?!” She exclaimed in deep concern, as she began to wonder if he was acting this way, because he was experiencing a lot of pain. “What’s the matter?! Is it your leg?” She asked, her hand nudging his bicep in desperation.

“No.” Gajeel stated darkly, his head rising up, as his fingers gripped her shoulder tightly. “I just
wish…” He began, his eyes going up towards her face, but it was almost like he wasn’t really looking at her. He looked so far away. “I wish I would have killed Thibault tonight.” He stated coldly.

Levy’s eyes were scaling over Gajeel’s deadly expression, taking it all in with such great sorrow built up in them. She could feel herself breaking all over again, after hearing him utter those words. The strings of her heart were reaching out to him desperately, in a need to quell the dark anger that he was harboring in her name. She didn’t want to believe that he was actually capable of murder… Not even to save her… But she knew that it could very well be true after witnessing the way he had unleashed on Thibault.

“No.” She replied quietly at first, her eyes still burning into him. “No you don’t!” She added more forcibly, while rocking his form lightly with her hand. “I didn’t want you to!” She exclaimed, feeling her own emotions spike as she was becoming deeply distraught. “And I’m glad you didn’t…” She spoke softly in an effort to remain calm. She could feel her tears gathering, but she made sure to keep them in for his sake. Gajeel glanced up at her, his expression hard and his eyes narrowed in disgust.

“You don’t get it.” He stated, his voice firm. “You didn’t have to see, what I did.” He paused, before continuing. “You didn’t have to see, the way you looked, when I found you!” He told her, his voice rising as that vile anger got away from him once more. “I-I can’t!” He started to stutter, his hand coming up and off of her, only to slam down onto the mattress. “I-I can’t!” He snapped meeting her with a fierce stare. “I-I can’t!” He was shouting, but was immediately silenced as Levy brought her body forward, pressing into him, her arms wrapping around his torso in a heartfelt embrace. The side of her head was going against his shoulder, her hair just underneath his chin as Gajeel sat there unable to move out of disbelief.

“Please…” She begged, a few stray tears making paths down her cheeks as her eyes squeezed shut. “Gajeel… Please, be okay, because I’m okay…” She pleaded with him. “I’m okay…”

Gajeel’s eyes were now settled on the part of her head that he could see just below his chin. He could feel his eyelids lowering and his expression becoming disfigured, almost like something was wrong. A deep frown pulling at his lips. Was he… becoming saddened by all of this?

That was exactly what was coming over him as he suddenly felt like his throat had closed up and his eyes were stinging dry. Levy had actually made him so sad with her pleading, that he felt like crying too. The whole concept of it felt so completely foreign as it had been many years since he had experienced the long abandoned emotion.

He slowly and cautiously brought his arms around her back lightly, his head lowering over hers as he felt her chest push into his, with each staggered breath she took. He didn’t know what else he could do, to comfort the disturbing feeling that was forming in the pit of his stomach, but holding her close seemed to be the initial instinct. His eyelids fell shut slowly as he stifled his breath, holding it together strongly.

“And I’m only okay…” Levy spoke, taking in his warmth as she felt his arms wrap securely around her small body, engulfing her, the weight of his head over hers. She was beginning to understand him much better now and she could feel the words he had spoken gripping at her heart in a way she had never imagined possible. He was in pain… Pain over what had happened to her… And he was at a complete loss on how to deal with it. And as if only to make matters worse, he was probably still blaming himself for it all, but he didn’t need to. In fact, if anything, the only reason she had been able to make it through this night, was because he had been there by her side from the very start. Keeping her safe and her mind sane. “Because of you…” She added quietly as she felt him ease over her, her words calming him.
Levy held him for a few seconds longer, before finally lifting her head up and off his chest. Her hands sliding out from behind his back, to his shoulders as her eyes slowly drew up to his face. Gajeel glanced down at her in return, his brow hardened around the piercing stare he held on her, as if to mask everything he had just been feeling… And yet… Levy could still see something more.

Levy’s own eyebrows pushed together as her hand slowly began to reach up towards his face. The longer she stared into his eyes, the surer she was that she could see the truth there in them. They held a certain vulnerability that she would have never suspected someone like Gajeel capable of possessing. It wasn’t something that most could see, as it was forbidden. Yet there it was, although reluctantly it still flowed out through his dark red irises, in one meaningful glance towards her. She could now see how truly troubled a man he was, whilst still overcome with the feeling of grief that she had rekindled within him. She hadn’t any idea that she possessed such power over him. All she really knew was, that he was her protector on this night and right now he was the one in need of some saving.

Her palm gently landed over his cheek, her own eyes narrowed in wonder as her fingers lightly swept over him. He didn’t move except to ease his expression some in surprise, too memorized by her touch to do much else. Her fingers traced down the side of his face, down to near his chin, in a soft caress as she searched his expression. Then she paused, keeping her fingers still lightly against his skin.

Gajeel couldn’t help, but be transfixed to her large glossy eyes. He watched as they moved down his face, only to land on his lips. Her eyelids lowering with her gaze. Her other hand was now coming up as the first one slid back. Her fingers gracing his cheekbones so very lightly, so now both of her hands were rested on either side of his face. Her head was beginning to angle up, in an effort to close in on the height difference between them, as she guided him down towards her in return.

She was slow and careful, but there was no pause, unlike Gajeel, who’s heart was beating so hard through his ribs, that he felt like it might actually split through them. He was absolutely frozen; his hands had dropped down and away, as she neared him with her lips parting. Fearful of what he might do, should he not take them off of her. Knowing he couldn’t trust himself around her and so he forced all of his restraint to come bursting forward as he felt Levy gently press her nose against him. Her lips just a touch away, this being the part where she hesitated. Teasing him with the miniscule amount of distance between them and her warm breath invading his senses. He could hear her quiet breathing as his own heart felt like it was beating in his throat. Her one hand sliding down towards the center of his neck over his Adam’s apple as she finally eased her lips against his and he took to her softly, almost as if he were afraid, afraid that if he did anything, she might stop, but she didn’t stop.

Her lips did lift off of his slowly, but only to part and meet with his again, her chin angling slightly this time as he felt their softness once more. She hung to him for a few seconds longer, before doing it again, a little more pressure each time they made contact slowly. Her mouth never truly going anywhere and the whole thing was just too much for Gajeel, as he was quickly discovering that he couldn’t hold out against her as she did this. Not with the way her lips felt, each brush against his, more tempting than the next.

She was starting to move a little faster now, getting a better feel of him. Both of her hands had somehow managed to find their way back to his shoulders, gripping to him for balance as she reached for him with each kiss, moving more into him, her head gaining ground and her body swaying into his. He was almost pulling back in his efforts to not touch her, but all that seemed to do was make her pursue him harder as two of her fingers folded over the collar of his shirt, to keep him from moving away any further. Her head was leaning way up, as so not to leave his mouth until Gajeel could no longer take it. He was quickly getting over the shock of Levy instigating the kiss, as
the idea of not touching her was no longer an option and his arms finally began to move.

His one hand went up, reaching for her head while the other went to her shoulder. His enormous palm went against her cheek, taking over. His slight grip, now gaining him favor as they kissed. He could feel her practically throwing some of the control back his way, as she withdrew her head back a little. Gajeel anxiously heeding to her as he began pushing forward, both of them moving more rapidly as their kiss was deepening.

Gajeel’s one hand was caressing over the skin of Levy’s shoulder and neck, until it moved up through her hair. His fingers raked through the wild blue strands gently, pulling them free of the hair tie that had been keeping them at bay. Meanwhile his other hand was reaching down under her chin, his thumb digging in as he pressed it up against her delicate jaw line, it’s pressure consistent enough for him to keep her steady so that he could kiss her harder. The power behind the slight motion, speaking volumes about who was really in control, as Levy’s lips parted in a slight gasp from his sudden dominance. Gajeel took that opportunity to bring his tongue in, bringing the breath right out of her as she so graciously relinquished to him. His hand’s grip over her face loosened, as he felt her not only obeying, but also replying, despite being caught off guard. His fingers slid off her face and down slowly, hovering still against the bottom of her chin lightly, as his mouth continued to play over hers.

He could feel the pressure of her small hands against his collarbone, just resting, as she was no longer leaning into him, but vice versa. Desperation was still plaguing the back of his mind, as he continued to kiss her in the form of a slight panic as if he knew the moment was fleeting. This was Levy after all and she would never let it last, so he knew he needed to take full advantage while she was still allowing him to.

He boldly let his hand fall to the side of her stomach, his fingers outstretches over her some. The tightness of her dress allowing him to feel the smooth fluent line of her shape, against his palm. He felt lost to her now, all of his coherent thoughts were melting away to the feeling of her body. She did nothing to aid with this, as she too responded to his touch by leaning back into him as she had earlier. Both of her hands gracing the sides of his face again as their mouths moved over each other. This motion from her being just the encouragement Gajeel needed, as his other hand snapped around her waist.

Now he had both arms moving securely around her as he felt her pushing her small body up into his. Her fingers and hands hanging to him as she kissed him and he took that as his opportunity to finally bring her the rest of the way to him. His arms tightening around her as he hoisted her small frame up with little to no effort, taking hold of her, before she was even able to change her mind about it. Their kiss ending, by the shift in movement.

Her knees were coming up onto the bed without fight, her one sliding into place right beside his sutures, causing a sharp sting that he completely ignored. He had no choice, as any amount of pain was worth making her stay with him, just a little longer. Her other knee was going over the other side of his leg allowing him to feel the warmth between her thighs as her upper body fell into him like an embrace.

Gajeel’s eyes closed briefly at the sensation of her bare flesh, over his own. Taking pleasure in each and every bit of it, as his own heartbeat resounded in his red heated ears. He could feel his stomach lifting and all of his blood traveling south, as the last of his restraint vanished. His hands were running up her smooth back and over her shoulders, his fingers tensing up on her out of need. It was almost painful for him to try and hold back or let go at this point, as his head buried into her, his nose being invaded by her sweet smell.
Levy could feel the years of resistance she had stacked so high and for so long growing instantaneously weaker by the second, as her mind was still screaming faintly in the background to make it all stop, but it was too late. She was already held captive by each movement she felt Gajeel make, his hands, arms and mouth playing over her so vigorously that she was surrendering all power over to him. This feeling flowing through her veins like a drug, because she knew she had crossed into forbidden territory, but that was exactly what made it all so hard to stop.

The thrill of it all was spreading over her body; making her feel almost feverish in his grip as she felt his lips push to her neck. The wetness and warmth of his mouth against her, making her breath hitch as she squirmed underneath him. Her heart was bottoming out as she felt his other hand come up against the other side of her neck so that his rough palm was grazing over her skin, angling her head upwards in an effort to allow him complete access. His thumb then came pushing up against the source of her sound, as his large canines practically scraped at the sensitive flesh, before latching into it.

Levy’s eyes fell closed as she took in the sheer dominating feeling of the slight pain with a gasp; her sound reverberating out from her throat, but also against Gajeel’s thumb as he began to suck on her neck. He only did it for few seconds before pulling away to Levy’s surprise. His eyes enjoying the sight of her once creamy white skin, reddening as his hand slid down her neck to her sternum his palm stopping just over the beginning rise of her cleavage. He moved his face back against her, his nose gliding against her neck, moving upwards, so that he could kiss the place beneath her jaw. He could feel the rhythm of her heart as it thumbed against the open hand he had rested over her chest. It was beating so hard and fast. He felt like he could hear it. as it moved through her and into him with the contact they were sharing. His eyes closed as he planted another kiss under her jaw a little lower this time; her breathing was rapid as he could feel her beginning to tremble, from each advance he made on her. She was completely vulnerable now in his grasp, her small form a bundle of nerves and unrequited desire as he teased her sensitive neck; all of these reactions from her finally revealing that which she could no longer deny him, her need for him. It seemed that she had finally resigned in her fight to not let him have her with the way she was giving herself over to him, allowing him complete control, too far on the cusp to turn back now.

He watched her chest heave with each heavy breath she took, his eyes scanning over her greedily and enjoying each and every part of victimizing her. Although willingly it still had him twitching to do more, as he felt her growing warm, her temperature making him hot as well. She was finally going to let this happen… Something about that thought was driving him to near insanity, as he felt like he couldn’t hardly breathe himself.

He could smell the sweetness of her flesh, as his nose rested under her chin, his brow against the bottom of her jaw. His hand was sinking down from her sternum to over her chest, between her breasts slowly. He took in the slight chill that erupted through her, over his touch into his own being. Now his own breath was tangling in his throat, because of it. He could feel the spot between her thighs still pressed up and over his leg, so warm now. His own chest pounded, as his teeth clamped down for a few seconds. His hand continuing the slow decent down her ribs and over her stomach, her tiny muscles clenching in response. He exhaled a small breath in an effort to stay calm and keep his own body from trembling as he neared her waist. His own desire for her putting him on edge, just as much as she was. His hand continued on none the less, gliding down her thigh until his fingers reached the hem of her skirt, the tips of them just lightly grazing over the skin.

“Gajeel…” Levy spoke at the feeling of what he was doing, out of worry. Her voice sounded so light as if she were warning him. He responded by kissing her neck again softly, to bring her some
comfort. His hand coming back up to her face so that he could then look at her, his thumb swaying over her cheek. He pulled away from her enough so that they could look at each other, his deep stare matching her large eyes seriously.

“Levy….” He spoke her name with such weight as if everything was riding on it and he was desperate. Then he kissed her longingly, as if pleading with her to let him continue. Levy could feel her heart melting into it, moved by his plight and yet still terrified by it as well, as he began to pull away, his eyes searching her still, for promise.

Levy swallowed hard, her glossy eyes never leaving his as she nodded nervously, earning her another kiss as Gajeel brought his lips to her once again. This time he hung to her kiss as his other arm tightened its grip around her. She could feel him removing the hand from her face, so that he could set it back down at the hem of her skirt as he continued to kiss her.

Soon his whole palm flushed up against the skin of her upper thigh rubbing in slow circles. His fingers pushing their way up and underneath her skirt slightly, with each caress. She felt like a complete utter mess, trembling at his every move, her insides all aflutter. The only thing that was keeping her from shaking too violently, was the tight grip he had on her as they kissed. Finally, once she felt his hand move up further into her skirt, so that his fingers could explore the whole scope of her backend. She finally pulled away out of shock. His fingers were spreading over it and tensing up over the skin tightly, making her face go red, as she glanced down at Gajeel with wide eyes. He was completely groping her and she found that a bit hard to ignore, especially upon noticing the slight smirk on his face.

“G-G-Gajeel!” She uttered out both startled and a bit miffed and yet, not completely dissatisfied either.

“Sorry shrimp…” He began as he gave her another squeeze making her jump a little. “But do you know how long I have been waiting to do that?” He questioned her softly, his eyes staring intensely into hers, as he held his tiny smirk. Levy turned her head away from him, letting out a breath. Her expression slightly annoyed as she tried to put on the front that she wasn’t enjoying what he was doing.

“You’re a dog…” She choked out, her voice breathless as she felt his fingers still gripping to her.

“Aw c’mon.” He began, his tone somewhat amused. Making her turn her head to look back at him, as he smiled slyly. “I think we both know, you’ve got a great ass.” He spoke seductively, making Levy completely tongue-tied. His eyes narrowing in on her as he continued to smirk. Levy just pulled away from him slightly at this, her mind running in circles with no words.

“I…you…” Gajeel laughed lightly at her nervous stuttering

“Don’t worry…” He told her reassuringly, his tone easing as he finally pushed his hand up further, to the side of her waistline, over the sides of her underwear. Levy’s face only grew in color, as she felt his thumb messaging above the waistband of her panties, moving closer to her front. He could feel her begin to shudder as her fingers gripped at his shoulders, digging at the fabric of his shirt tightly. Her head lowered some, her face wincing faintly. Gajeel kept his eyes on her face steadily; he got a strange satisfaction out of watching her, as he let his hand play over the front of her panties now. His fingers sweeping lower and lower towards the center between her thighs, where he could feel the heat radiating off of her. He could feel his own throat drying up as his hand rested over her for a second.

“Damn…” He breathed out, taken aback by her heat. His eyes matching to her large wincing ones with such an intense stare, that Levy felt her heart stop. “You’re a million degrees…” He spoke like
he couldn’t get enough air in his lungs. Levy’s teeth were clamping down in frustration as he continued. “Ya know that?” He asked still in a gasp.

Levy could feel herself swallowing as he continued to let his hand hover over her teasingly, she did feel hot. So, hot… That her face felt like it was on fire as she brought her head down, resting her forehead against his shoulder. Cringing from the pain of wanting him, the muscles in her stomach tightening, feeling empty. Gajeel in turn leaned his face into her hair, his one hand finally sliding out from underneath her skirt and up to her head now. He caressed it through her hair as he breathed her in, allowing them both a moment to ease, as the tension was somewhat lifted. He could feel her shallow breathing and her body still trembling slightly as he brought his hand down from her head sliding it over her back in a half embrace.

Fuck… just from that… He was thinking as he held her, feeling his own body heave as well, from everything. I’ll probably lose my damn mind if this doesn’t happen tonight… He thought, rising his head up some as he felt another sharp pain from his leg. Suddenly wishing circumstances were different so that he didn’t have the damn injury getting in his way by any means. Whatever… fuck it… I ain’t lettin’ that stop me… He thought as both hands landed back on either side of Levy’s tiny waist. No way in hell… Was his next thought as Levy lifted her head off of him to look back at his face so that he could catch her stare.

“This…” He spoke, his fingers touching the thin belt over her dress, still around her waist. “Needs ta come off.” Levy looked down at the belt Gajeel was letting his fingers settle on, before looking back up at him.

Apparently, this was actually going to happen now… And it wasn’t as if she hadn’t already known that. Considering all of what had just transpired between them, but his speaking to her, was like a wakeup call. Making her have to go back and rethink the whole thing, just so she could get over the pride of letting him finally get his way, even though she did indeed want to be with him too.

“So…?” Levy uttered out a bit confused, as she raised a brow at him, her expression looking somewhat troubled.

“Well… it’s simple shrimp…” Gajeel began, taking her in with just the slightest hints of a smirk. “Do you wanna take it off, or should I?” Levy watched him for a few seconds, taking in his laughing red eyes. Her cheeks were puffing out a little, stubbornly. Her head snapped to the side, as she could no longer stand to look at him with her shaken pride. Her own tiny hands reached down quickly to the belt buckle, working fast, but it was difficult, because she was still trembling. And, because she had her head turned away, refusing to so as much as glance his way while she did what he wanted. Gajeel was more than happy to let her do it herself. He just sat back and watched her small hands fumble with the buckle, until she finally got it undone. Her hand was pulling the belt away from her waist, holding it by the end as her arm lifted up. She finally turned her head back to face Gajeel, as her arm went open holding the belt out, and over the floor. She had her one eyebrow raised up at him. Gajeel’s smirk only widened at the look of attitude she shot him, before her hand opened, letting the small belt hit the floor carelessly. Gajeel couldn’t stop the grin from forming over his face, as he was both amused and turned on by her unrelenting demeanor.

She kept her pointed stare on him as her hands came back to her sides. Her expression never changing, almost as if she were challenging him with it. Gajeel sat there a moment, allowing himself to really revel in the satisfaction of having her in such a position with him. Although reluctantly, she was still obeying. He wouldn’t have preferred it any other way. Her spiteful distaste for it all, just added to the fun of it for him, because he knew it was all just an act. She wouldn’t have been doing this if she truly didn’t want to, so why not rub it in her face a bit?
That was what he was thinking as his eyes traveled from her face down the length of her presented body, taking in every bit of it.

On second thought, maybe he shouldn’t be wasting anymore time. His hands were already beginning to twitch at the mere idea of touching her again. His heart was still pounding furiously through him as he continued to look over her. He was pushing his body back up to meet hers. The need of it all, was overwhelming him as he brought his hands back to her waist.

Levy didn’t move, as Gajeel brought his face back towards hers. Her expression was somber as she watched him. He hesitated once in range, his nose grazing hers before finally pressing his lips to hers lightly, in another comforting kiss. He could tell from the look she was shooting him, that she was stiffening up on him once again. Fearful of what was happening. Fearful of what they were finally doing. And why shouldn’t she be? After all of the times she had shot him down, he wouldn’t have expected anything less from her as he really had no right. No right to be with her ever… And yet it was almost as if fate was rewarding him for some unknown reason, because here they were. He felt undeserving, but at the same time… He was far too selfish of a man to not take what he wanted…

He kissed her, moving his head back some, once they parted so that he could match eyes with her again. She was still giving him that same unmovable gaze, mesmerized by him and yet still somewhat in need of his strength to continue and so he kissed her again. This time he didn’t let go as he wrapped his arms more securely around her, drawing her into him. His large body basically swallowing her smaller one, as his hand swayed over her back and into her hair again. He could feel her beginning to ease with him once again, returning his powerful kiss. Her hands were coming to his torso as their bodies swayed together. He knew he was really pulling her in, once she gripped at the fabric of his shirt, his tongue moving in on her, like before.

The both of them were growing hot once again, moving fast. His body pulled away from hers some, so that his hands could grab each of hers. Levy’s mouth stayed over his as she followed him. His fingers were intertwining with hers, so now he had both of her hands locked in his. Then suddenly his body was moving further back, his back falling to the bed and he took her with him. Pulling her down, over top of him as his head hit her pillow, both sets of their locked hands falling on either side of him.

Levy was so surprised by the action, that she pulled away from his kiss just as he hit the mattress. Gajeel partially leaned back up at this, as Levy stayed back, ripping her hands out of his. She looked down at him a bit alarmed. He watched her now, he was propped up some on his one arm.

“What’s a matter shrimp?” He asked as he watched her glance down at him. Her eyes were looking over his large legs. Her much smaller legs were still in-between his as she straddled over the one. He couldn’t help, but notice where her eyes were drawn to for a moment… Just below the waistband of his boxers. Her knee was now resting against the spot between his legs. He could feel her there suddenly, and now he knew that she could most definitely feel him as well. He didn’t say anything upon realizing this and instead just began to move his body back up. His hands coming down on the bed so that he could hoist himself back some, on the bed. His body shifted, taking her with it, her small form rocking some, gripping to his shoulder and neck so she wouldn’t completely fall over him. It was very painful moving like this, because of his leg, but Gajeel swallowed the pain in one low quiet groan.

Now he was sitting further back against the bed, his body leaning back more than it had been minutes before, but not all the way down, so he was still sitting upright for the most part. Levy looked over at him, raising herself up and off of him some, so that she could match eyes with him. He could still feel her knee dangerously close to the spot between his legs. Not only that, but the pain of his stitches hadn’t subsided yet… That had been the whole reason why he was going to try and
position her on top, but she didn’t seem ready for that just yet and so he had thought this might work better.

“Levy…” He spoke getting her attention. “Sorry bout that… It’s just, my leg…” At that Levy’s head snapped down to where she was sitting, dangerously close to his sutures.

“Oh! Gajeel I’m sorry…” She choked out, looking back up at him. “So that’s why… But… Maybe we shouldn’t-”

“No…” Gajeel stated firmly, his hand taking hold of hers once again. His eyes were digging deep into hers, almost critically. “No more runnin away.” He told her commandingly. Levy held his look with her doe like eyes, before finally nodding at him timidly. He brought her one hand up, kissing the tops of her knuckles gratefully, before bringing them back down. “Here shrimp…” He began trying to ease the mood again. “I got an idea… You took something off, so now it’s only fair that I do too, right?”

“It was just a belt Gajeel.” Levy replied skeptically.

“Hey!” Gajeel snapped pointing. “Doesn’t matter…” He added. “It was damn hot.” Levy couldn’t help, but smile at him, as she shook her head modestly. He was pleased with himself for getting her to smile at him like that, despite how nervous he knew she was. “And now, since you did that fer me, I’ma do this for you.” He told her, making Levy roll her eyes at him.

“Oh yea? For me? Really?”

“Hell yea shrimp, there ain’t anyone else here. Less you know something I don’t?” Levy shook her head at him, still smiling.

“No definitely not.” She replied.

“Good.” He stated. “You are all mine then.” Gajeel added seductively, leaning in to kiss her gently, before pulling back away from her, just enough to smirk at her with a confident face. “Now keep yer eyes over here.” He demanded lowly.

Levy watched him, still smiling, but her one eyebrow was rising up, as if unimpressed as Gajeel pulled back just a little further. His hands were finally grabbing at the bottom of his shirt as he peeled it off, right over his head. His eyes were back on her with that same smug and confident stare down, as he discarded the shirt onto the ground. The muscles of his upper arms and chest flexing, with the overhead motion of it all.

Levy’s eyes widened for a brief second, caught off guard by the sight of his masculine physic. She had always kind of instinctively known he had to look good, but she hadn’t ever imagined it, as good as actually seeing his naked torso. His wide shapely pectorals, providing him with the mass he so often carried. Giving way into the rigid slabs, that were his abdominal muscles. Finally providing the missing piece of the puzzle, that was his upper body, whenever she had laid eyes on his large biceps and finally corded forearms.

Once she had gotten the full affect, she quickly glanced away, suddenly remembering herself. She sat there, refusing to look his way as her cheeks began to burn, all whilst trying to recover from the sight of him. She was trying her damn hardest to play it cool, as she felt Gajeel’s eyes still over her.

“So…?” He asked, as if expecting praise.

“So… what?” She questioned.
“Do you like what you see?” He asked her boldly, completely unaffected by her blatant act of ignorance.

“Oh that…” Levy took that moment to glance back over at him shyly, before immediately glancing away again. “Oh… Well… You know… Not bad…” She chimed in and her voice was light, like she couldn’t breathe.

“Not bad huh?” Gajeel questioned sarcastically. He knew what she was doing. “C’mon shrimp, you hardly even looked.” Levy’s eyes were now moving up to the ceiling as she could feel the warmth in her cheeks spreading to her neck. Oh… I looked all right… She thought. I just wish I hadn’t… Was her next thought, her eyes closing regrettfully as she had no interest in feeding his ego any more than she already was, even if he did look damn fine.

She could feel his eyes on her again as she refused to look back at him, that was until she heard movement. Gajeel was shifting up towards her again, forcing her to finally look back at his finely sculpted body. His face was coming near, his red eyes pulling her in, as he took hold of one of her hands again, by the wrist this time. She inhaled a small breath at their closeness; his face was only inches away from hers, his expression darkening. His other hand was on her shoulder while the other was still clutching her wrist tightly. She felt locked in his clutches as he stared her down with his hard-studded brow lowered.

“Maybe you oughta feel.” He demanded before yanking her hand towards his torso, firmly. Levy could feel the hidden strength behind his grip. Almost as if he wanted her to know, that his muscles weren’t just for show as he basically manhandled her forward, before flushing her palm and fingers against the warm, tan skin of his abdominals. Her breathing had gone a bit rapid as he kept her hand there, locked in his and pressed up against him. She knew she wouldn’t be able to get away, while he held her there with his intimidating strength. He kept his eyes over hers intently, before finally freeing her wrist.

Levy’s eyes dropped down away from his face slowly. She was a bit shaken by his sudden act of dominance as she caught her breath, but excited by it too. She looked down, over the length of his chest, catching the rhythm of his breathing as she noticed the rise and fall of it. She could feel the smooth layer of flesh over hard rigid muscles, her fingers spreading over them as she felt each one of those breaths move through him. Her eyes then landing over her own tiny white hand, still settled over the mass of muscles clad in his darker skin. It looked so miniscule against them, making her feel so small when next to him. Slowly her fingers swept over the defined lines of his stomach delicately. Gajeel had moved back some, allowing the muscles to stretch out more as Levy brought her other hand to him. She watched completely mesmerized by the movement of them, as he responded to each touch she made over him with small spasms. Her body was leaning more into his now, as Gajeel allowed himself to lean back against the bedpost and pillows. She was inching towards him, her knees shifting further up. Gajeel inhaled a sharp breath as the one knee was moving up and in-between his legs once again. He could feel her against him, the feeling of it, only making him throb all the harder. There was also the pain of his injury pulsing once more, but that was becoming much easier to ignore as Levy drew in closer.

She was now hanging over him, her hands over his chest for balance. Gajeel was moving his hands up, to the sides of her thighs as she shifted. She was no longer straddling his leg. He could feel the absence of her warmth now, but he made up for it by letting both of his hands grip either side of her backend. His chest was tightening from the tension of this new position. Her one hand was now against his pectoral as the other slid over his collarbone in the direction of his large shoulder.

She had finally brought her large eyes back up to meet his face slowly, her expression looked subtly
pleased as her hand continued to sway over him. He could feel himself getting lost in that look, as if she was letting him know that she wanted him with it. The hands he had over her butt were no longer gripping as he began to instead move the fabric of her dress up, exposing her before letting his fingers run over the naked skin and over the small of her back. Levy responded by closing her eyes, leaning down and kissing his neck. Gajeel closed his own eyes at the feeling of her wet lips over him, his hands still running over her soft skin. He was starting to move his fingers further inside the dress, caressing them up and down the sides of her waistline gently. He was free to move them up further now that she was no longer wearing her belt. He could feel her tensing the muscles of her stomach, as he rubbed them against her. His own throat was starting to close up, as he reached higher. The heat in his ears returning upon reaching the lining of her bra.

She was stiffening on him again, but this time he wasn’t going to let her pull away, as he immediately shifted up more. Securing one of his arms back around her waist. He felt the tearing pain of his stitches once again from the sudden movement, but he gritted his teeth and bared it, as he brought her over to him this time. Her body now over his hips. He watched her face turn bright red with surprise. Her wide eyes and wild loose hair, making her look cute as she felt the same thing he had. The contact of their lower halves, pressed up through the thin lining of her panties and his boxers.

Gajeel’s eyes narrowed in on her, he could feel that heat again, fueling his whole body. The arm he had snaked around her lower back was tight with the feeling of it as it kept her locked in place. His own face was turning red as he began to sweat. The one hand he still had underneath her dress was still caressing the soft skin of her stomach. Levy of course looked a little worried once again, as her one arm had moved around his neck, her head was positioned just a little above his.

“Levy…” He spoke right into her ear, his breath against her, as his hand was once again moving up towards her bra lining. She said nothing, but instead just closed her eyes, as she felt his fingers coming into contact with one of her breasts, through her bra. Her mouth began to open some, as his hand gathered it up, his thumb swaying over the fabric, feeling her erect nipple underneath. Her head moved up some, her eyes tearing away from him. Gajeel took that as his cue to slide his other hand, up and under her dress so that he could do the same with the other breast. She was becoming incredibly warm on top of him and he could feel her wetness as both of his thumbs continued to toy with her nipples. He glanced up at her exposed neck, kissing it gently as he also grew tense with desire.

Her breasts were the perfect size, just filling the scope of his hand as he continued to toy with her. His focus shifting towards each face and noise she would make in response to him. That and the feeling of her pressed up against him, was driving him to his wits end. He honestly didn’t know how much more of his own teasing he could take.

“Damn it Levy…” He was muttering as his jaw clenched. Her head was still angled up, as she heard him speak, her mouth slightly agape.

“W-What is it?” She asked. Her voice was weak as her eyelids fell shut just as Gajeel’s large thumb pressed into her again. She swallowed dryly, as he just wouldn’t let up. His fingers were pure torture and yet she couldn’t get enough of them.

“Take this off!” He demanded his voice was rough with frustration as he spoke in reference to her dress. Levy heard him, her heart colliding with her ribcage as her mind was made up. Her hold on him softened as she started to let go.

“You do it.” She ordered in a gasp. She was too much in the thick of intimacy to be stubborn or worried about her pride now. This was no longer about the game, but just pure aspiration, as she no
longer wanted to be kept apart from him. Her body was once again quivering with need, anxious for
the next step, terrified by her own bravery to allow him such privilege, but exasperated by the idea of
not giving into him at this point. It was all just too much waiting. Why should she always be content
to live in the confines of what was supposedly ‘appropriate’ for her? She was tired of avoiding the
things she truly wanted out of a need to stay safe. She wanted to be with Gajeel, even if it was just
for this one night. She could hardly remember having any other thought be half as fulfilling just as
she felt his large hands over her again.

She was stricken with relief, as she felt them traveling down her waist to do as she ordered him,
albeit slower than she would have liked as if he was unsure. He hesitated, his large fingers settled
over her waist.

“If that’s what you want?” He was suddenly saying softly in question. Levy’s body eased slightly
from all the pent-up tension. Her eyelids lowering some, as she smiled warmly. His need to make
sure she felt safe with him was endearing and unexpected. She had always imagined him being far
more aggressive, but he seemed to handle her with care most of the time. Her hands reached to either
side of his face, as she brought her lips down over his head, kissing him on the crown.

“Please…” She spoke softly. Her hands sliding off of him as they met eyes again. His hands were
beginning to grip at the black fabric of her dress as he pushed his lips over hers. She could feel the
goose bumps forming as he slowly gathered the dress up raising it higher and higher, their mouths
still against each other. Finally, they pulled apart just as Levy moved her arms so Gajeel could pull
the piece of clothing off of her the rest of the way, over her head in one swift motion.

Levy couldn’t contain the small smile that crept over her lips as she met eyes with him again, her
cheeks tinted pink. Gajeel had his eyes locked to hers, as he matched her smile, with his own tiny
one. Both of them were thinking the same thing, as Gajeel basically tossed the dress aside without
looking away.

“There we go…” Gajeel spoke, both of his hands going to either side of her face gently as he kept
his eyes on hers, his thumbs swaying over her cheeks some. “Beautiful.”

Levy glanced away from him modestly, her face still pink as she moved her head out of his hands, so
that they moved down to her shoulders instead. She scoffed lightly at him.

“Come on Gajeel.” She replied looking back at him, her head tilting, but her eyes still looked playful.
“I think you can save me the lines at this point.” She added with a smirk.

“Yea…” Gajeel replied with a small laugh, his own infamous smirk spreading over his lips. “Sorry
shrimp, ya know me.” His expression calming as a hand slid back up her neck, his eyes lowering.

“Yes…” She answered as she watched his eyes move over her breast and even further down. “I do.”
She could feel her heart going again, her now mostly naked skin feeling a bit chilled as she sat over
him, vulnerable with anticipation. The hand around her neck was wrapping around the back, moving
up her head a little and tightening over her. His other large hand went to the side of her stomach; its
presence bringing welcomed warmth with it, now that she was no longer covered, before it slid up
slowly. His eyes were coming back up to hers, after he finished looking her over, but then they
closed instantaneously, as he forcefully pushed her to him again. She could feel his fingers playing
with the hair at the back of her head, as his mouth pushed over hers hard. He wasted no time pushing
his tongue in, pulling the air right out of her as if he could no longer stand the distance.

The hand over the back of her head was moving back down, his fingers grazing down the center of
her spine. The chill of his touch made her pull away from his mouth to breathe, as she instinctively
arched her back. Her head and eyes moved up, as her mouth went open to take in the air, allowing
Gajeel to once again kiss at her neck. His other hand now landing back over her breast teasingly, as the other one resided to running up and down her spine sparingly. His lips moved over the source of her sound, as he listened for her quiet panting. Her chest was moving in rhythm with the breaths as his eyes glided down over her sternum. He lifted his hand up and over her, feeling the white skin he so often admired, before bringing his lips back down over her collarbone. The hand sliding back up, to her neck as he continued to kiss paths over the delicate line of the bone, to her shoulder.

Levy had resigned herself to just watching him, with eyes hazed over as she felt his lips press over her with each kiss, warming her from the inside out. Her eyelids fell shut gently, heeding to the pleasure of that feeling as he began moving lower. He was being sickeningly slow on purpose. She hadn’t any idea why, but either way she was willing to endure the pace despite her aching. Her rapid breathing was making her own body shake, as she tried to remain calm. Her eyes opened just as she felt Gajeel’s wet mouth pressing over the cleavage of one of her breasts. She couldn’t help, but notice his own eyes were closed as his lips lifted off of her once again, the absence of warmth, now, in the place where contact had been. His focus was on her and nothing else, his face staying consistently relaxed with each kiss he made over her.

She couldn’t understand how he was able to remain calm under such circumstances, when she felt like her skin was crawling. Her fingers and nails were digging into him subconsciously, as she held to him tightly. She could feel him beneath her, pressing into her, and yet he seemed perfectly capable to go on, at his slow pace without pause. She found it incredibly frustrating. Her face was beginning to cringe some, as his mouth was now pushing over her bra, wetting the fabric as she felt him hold it over her. His warm breath all-encompassing as his wet tongue slid over the rise of her nipple.

"G-Gajeeel…” She muttered, her frustration piquing. Why the hell was he doing this? It had taken him this long to get her here and now he was just toying with her. His head finally came up at the sound of her voice. He looked over her and sure enough he had that cocky grin on his face.

"Yea shrimp?” He asked coolly and Levy could feel the color in her face spreading, not just out of frustration, but annoyance. Her eyes narrowed on him, before speaking.

“What the hell are you doing?” She questioned him, completely exasperated.

“Whatever the hell I want, like I told you before.” He replied as he kissed her neck again.

“No…” Levy answered, moving her head away some so he wouldn’t keep at it, her one eye closing. “You’re being a tease Gajeel.”

“You’re damn straight.” He answered, his hands tensing over her. She could feel the danger of his strength, once again as his fingers dug into her. “I’m gonna enjoy this.” He told her, his head leaning in close, so that he could speak right into her ear forcefully. “And you are going to fucking let me.”

Each word that dripped from his mouth was clear and definitive, almost as if he was genuinely threatening her. Levy’s eyes grew wide, as her chest heaved in a mild panic. So, he was capable of being aggressive with her. Although fearful, she wasn’t truly surprised by this new disposition towards her; in all of the time she had known Gajeel, she had always been aware of this darker side of him. For this was the Gajeel she had met in that alleyway over three years ago. The one who had tried to intimidate her into running away. The one who had brutally assaulted her attacker in the parking lot tonight. On numerous occasions, he had shown that despite his much tamer demeanor towards her, he was still a man of force above all else. Always grabbing her, reaching for her without warning, each and every time they ran into each other. Any excuse he could find to touch her, without permission and against her better judgment she had always let him get away with it unscathed. She certainly wasn’t asking for these advances from him. In fact, she had always tried like hell to do the opposite and avoid him altogether, but never once had she ever tried to call for help,
whenever he did make unwarranted physical contact with her. Even when knowing she could, because the two of them had often times been in public when these situations took place.

She had always treated the incidents with fear though; backing away from him, but never truly going anywhere. She was hesitant to leave, almost as if some part of her enjoyed that fear of him. This hidden satisfaction of hers, was ever present each and every time Gajeel did do something unexpected towards her. His shouldered impurities were always hanging over her, just like that large dark shadow of his, on the night they had met.

She could feel the tight grip he had over her, like a warning to not disobey and she wouldn’t. His daunting disposition had her frozen, just like earlier when he had forced her to touch him. She was no match for him like this; she was prey to her inner most desires. Subject to whatever he wanted to put her through, as she was forced to shed them all, revealed and helpless to stop him.

“I finally got you Levy…” He was whispering into her ear arrogantly; his voice was so possessive and racked with greed. “You’re not going anywhere…” He confirmed quietly, as his one hand was sneaking up under the lining of her bra, his fingers padding over her breast, rubbing slowly. “And so maybe…” He huffed, his breath over her neck, as his fingers were hovering circles over her, around her nipple as she opened her mouth. “You ought to get used to it?” He finished. Levy could feel her chest constrict, there never seeming to be enough air for her lungs as Gajeel brought his tongue over hear earlobe. Levy started to wince at the wetness, trying her damn hardest to not completely lose it, before his teeth came next. Nibbling at the sensitive skin of her ear, this finally erupting into a small sound between a gasp and moan. The sound shook violently as if she had tried to stop it, but wasn’t able to. The thumb of Gajeel’s free hand was once again pushing over her throat as he lifted his mouth up and off of her ear, with a flick of his tongue.

“Bout time you finally made some noise. Yer so damn quiet…” He spoke, his tone low and almost spiteful sounding, as his eyes narrowed on her, while she was still in his grasp.

up…” She choked out, her chest rising and falling more rapidly as she still felt his fingers over her, circling lightly. It was true that she may have been his victim for the moment, but that didn’t mean she needed to swallow every last thing he said about her. Her eyes glanced over to him, as she heard him laugh coldly for a brief second.

“I guess not completely…” He was grinning at her evilly, his face nearing hers. His fingers suddenly pinching her nipple, earning him another sound from her, as Levy’s eyelids fell shut, her head lowering from the sting. Her mouth opened as she gasped again, her nails were clawing at his skin purposely hard, now that he was doing this to her.

He watched her, his eyes widening. Listening to her voice resound in slight pain, spurring his own want too much to ignore, as he felt her scratches drag down his back. He pushed his teeth back into her neck without warning, biting her far harder than he had earlier. Levy’s eyes were squeezing shut tightly as she couldn’t stop the involuntary noise from flowing out of her mouth, due to sheer agony, both internal and external. Her stomach muscles were tightening as her hands reached up, gripping into his hair like that would somehow save her. She could feel tears beginning to pool in her eyes as she felt like all breathing had escaped her. The sensation was breaking through her, the twisted nature of it, giving her rise and vindication. She was actually enjoying the pain, but she didn’t know for how much longer she could stand it and luckily Gajeel seemed to pick up on this. He finally let her go, his large canines most definitely leaving her marked this time.

Levy’s head lowered some as her breathing finally caught up with her in one trembling sigh. The residual pain of his bite was still tingling as she began to feel his tongue press over the spot of her irritated skin gently. She closed her eyes again as the sensation resounded. Her mouth was open,
taking in the air in large heaving breaths to make up for not being able to breath before. She could feel an internal battle at her core; a large part of her was relieved by his release of her neck, taking comfort in the way his lips were now pressing to the spot his teeth had just been sunk into, seconds before. The other part of her was missing the absence of them, her mind struggling to fathom how she could possibly find pleasure, out of something that had hurt so badly. It was hard to make sense of any thought, as the whole room spun around her all while Gajeel began to kiss her soothingly.

Levy allowed herself to ease against his lips; the only thing she was certain of was his wanting of her. She had been able to sense that through the pain he had inflicted on her and so maybe, that was why she hadn’t minded succumbing to it in that moment. Adhering to his will, just so she could maybe understand him as a whole just a little bit better, because for some reason she really did want to know him. Know him at least, as well as he knew her, but everything about Gajeel was so mysterious, where as her life was like an open book, or so she thought at least. Easy to read and figure out. Boring.

She couldn’t understand why he seemed so fixated on her, but he was, and that was the one thing Levy was discovering. She could quite literally feel Gajeel’s desperation for her, through that sensation and she could tell he took a certain pleasure in hurting her for being plagued with it. She could also feel his instant regret for what he had inflicted on her, as he suddenly handled her almost apologetically with care, in the moments right after.

Gajeel was watching the movement of her throat as she swallowed uneasily; deeply shaken by everything he was putting her through and the strange gratification that arose from within her, because of it. It felt wrong somehow, like he was corrupting her and yet he knew she wouldn’t pull away. He could sense her fear and feel her agony as she shook violently. He was doubling back with his restraint, as he found great fulfillment out of doing these things to her. Making her shudder and gasp out. Making her hurt, as if it made up for her existence in his life and the ever-present emptiness he had inherited from it.

His arms were pulling her into him and she just let him carry on without fight. Her brain struggling to keep up, as his large body wrapped around her, embracing her. His warm bare skin, was pressed up against her own. Her small hands were hovering over the muscles of his back as her chin rested over his shoulder. She could feel his head burying into hers, as he engulfed her with his overwhelming size again. His chest was pushing against hers, as his hands were running over her back, swaying up and down.

His body was capturing the movement of Levy’s own, securing her quivering form, with his much steadier one. Her chin moved down and off of his shoulder, as her head shifted, so that it was rested against his chest now instead. His weight was hanging over hers like a blanket, as she followed his breathing pattern; her body easing into his touch. Her ear was pressed up against him, as she felt his one hand moving up and around her head, cradling her to him.

She listened to the rhythm of his heart. She once again felt very safe with him and it made her insides melt. It was hard to understand how he could go from being so fearsome and dangerous one minute, to comforting and gentle in the next, but she truly did trust him, despite the nature of his ways and that was the real reason why she was okay with this. She knew deep down, that despite whatever pain he might really cause her, that he would never let any harm come to her. She could feel that, in the way he held her; his muscles clenched tight, warming her body. His slight shivers shaking with them as she heard him take his own quivering breath.

Levy waited for Gajeel’s grip over her to soften, as his hand ran through her hair, caressing back
down to her back. She slowly started to lift her head up and off of him as she felt the slack. Gajeel
allowed her to raise up and pull away enough, so that she could look back at him, making eye
contact. Her face was somber, as if she was too weighed down by all of the emotions hanging
between them. Gajeel was watching her with an equally serious expression, his brow hardening
again as Levy reached for him. Making him close his eyes, as her finger began to trace over each one
of the piercings above his left eye. Feeling the cool rise of each metal stud, followed by the smooth
patches of skin between each one of the three on his brow. Goose bumps were forming over her
arms as she felt them. This was something she had always wanted to do admittedly, even if she
hadn’t wanted to come to terms with that fact. Deep down she knew this would be the only time she
would ever get to.

Gajeel’s eyes opened and fixated back on her, as her fingers once again swayed over the line of his
cheekbone, down to his chin. Pausing, so that her thumb could run over the two piercings below his
bottom lip, before holding to the last one as her eyelids lowered and she leaned in to kiss him. He
could feel her pressing into him, deepening their kiss. Her hands moving down, to settle over his
wrists, then sliding forward so that her fingers could make contact with each one of the large studs,
embedded into his forearms. His body tensed as he felt her delicately trace over the tattered and
stretched skin of his scars, completely unaffected by them. Then finally she reached the bend of his
elbows, fastening her grip to each one, as they continued to kiss more rapidly.

Gajeel had his own hands running up either side of her waist until he felt her hold on him tighten.
Her kneading fingers were luring him in closer and he took that as a sign. His arms were reaching
more around her, so that his hands were making their way towards the center of her back. His fingers
gliding up her spine, to over the band of her bra.

Levy stopped, the fabric around her was becoming flimsy as the straps of her bra began to fall loose
over her shoulders. She pulled away from him with red cheeks; the motion of him undoing the piece
of clothing had been so effortless on his part, that it gave her pause. She hadn’t even felt a snap or
realized what had happened until after he had already done it and she found that alarming, as it
forced her to remember how familiar Gajeel was with these types of situations. She was just one on a
list of many conquest by him. It was an especially cold realization when Levy herself had only ever
been with two other people intimately and they had both been in previous relationships ages ago. She
had to swallow hard, as her stomach began to turn uncomfortably. Now she wasn’t able to get all of
the other women he had been with, out of her mind.

She was on the verge of a crossroads, when Gajeel’s large hand came over her shoulder. He was
gently pushing the strap of her bra, down her arm. He hadn’t yet noticed her hesitation as he had
taken her pulling away from their kiss, as just a means for him to remove the piece of clothing
without trouble. Levy watched, as his eyes stayed focused in on the task at hand. She could feel a
burning, in her insides as she wondered just how many partners he had, had and how often. Her
heart felt like it was losing volume, as his fingers brushed down her arms, making her skin crawl.

He had managed to free the first arm and was reaching for the other. She was becoming a bundle of
nerves, all due to her now much more naked appearance. That fixation Gajeel seemed to have for
her, was lost among a crowd of others, as she let these negative thoughts swell inside of her head.
The bumps had returned to her limbs, as she had to fight the urge to not let him free her remaining
arm, before he was discarding the bra to the floor. Her body was now exposed like so many before
her, and she suddenly couldn’t let it go. Her pride was back with a vengeance, now with a certain
insecurity tagging along side it.

Levy’s arms came reaching instinctively up, to cover her now naked torso. Crossing over the modest
rise of her chest, in an effort to conceal them from Gajeel just as he turned back to look at her. His red eyes immediately darted down, expecting to see what she was now not letting him, before he started to reach for her wrist. Of course, he’d go straight to grabbing her. It was what he always seemed to do, as his eyes snapped back up to her face, with a hard brow.

“Hey now.” He was saying, as his large hand wrapped over her forearm. She could feel his knuckles scraping over her skin, as she kept her arms tightly in place. He wasn’t pulling on her or anything just yet, but he did have a nice hold on her. “What is this?” He questioned, his tone concerned yet frustrated. He hadn’t any idea what had suddenly gotten into her, as things had seemed to be moving fine not seconds before.

“Stop.” Levy was saying as she felt the tension in his grip.

“Not till you tell me why yer runnin away from me again.” He answered seriously, as he began prying her arm away from her body. He was so damn strong and she knew he wasn’t even trying that hard.

“Gajeel.” Levy scolded him in a weak voice, as he brought his other hand up. He was pulling her arms down, revealing her body to him, but he kept his eyes up for the moment. His head was leaned in close towards her face, some of the hair was falling to the middle of his forehead, as his red eyes sliced through her in a narrowed look. She shifted her stare up and away from his; she could feel her face growing warm, as she felt helpless in his grip.

“No, what’s gotten into you?” He asked. “You were all over me just a second ago. Now yer pulling away from me again and if ya think I’m lettin’ you stop now Levy…”

“You wouldn’t make me Gajeel.” She spoke. “Not if I didn’t want too.”

These words echoed through Gajeel’s mind, her tone sounded confused again and he couldn’t have that. She needed to be just as sure as he was and so he found himself just acting, with no thought to his own injury.

His grip on her tiny forearms tightened, as he brought them together between the two of them. He now had a secured grip on her as he began to push her body off of him forcefully. His body spun around on the bed, taking her with him, as he practically threw her small frame down on the mattress beneath him with a twist. He growled in great pain at the movement of his leg, as Levy’s back bounced on the bed from the force of his toss. His hands were going over hers, lacing with her fingers as he pinned her down, his head going up subconsciously with a groan. She watched him with wide eyes, shocked by what he had done and concerned by the face he was making.

“Are you okay!?” She questioned hastily. Gajeel glanced back down at her with a breath.

“Yea… I’m fine.” He told her reassuringly. “This just… Hurts more.” He replied referring to being on his knees as he turned his head and glanced back at his bad leg. He then turned back towards her. His eyes scanning from her face down and then back up again, taking it all in slowly. This was what he had always wanted since the night he had met her, to see her lying underneath him naked, vulnerable and beautiful. She was so much more to him, than he could even yet comprehend. “But it’s so worth it.” He added, making Levy’s cheeks flush, as she turned her head away from him shyly. Her wild blue hair scattered against the mattress around her, as her eyes shut gently. She looked a bit miffed, among other things.

“You’re an idiot… You’re going to hurt yourself if you do things like that.” She scolded.

“Do you know how long I’ve waited to get you underneath me like this?” Gajeel questioned, once
again being overly honest. Levy dared to crack open an eye at him as he gave her a very serious look. “There’s no way in hell I’ma let this damn leg get in the way of it.” He confirmed, making the color in Levy’s face spread to her neck as she locked into his stare with both eyes open for a moment. She could feel her heart beating fast with his words. He seemed so truthful, but how could that be? This was Gajeel! He always had some sort of bullshit line, to spout out. She knew she shouldn’t be buying into it, but it was hard considering where they were and what they were doing. 

*Wake up Levy…* Her head was calling.

“Oh come on Gajeel!” Levy snapped, after regaining her wit. “We both know you’ve been with countless girls! Stop acting like you are pining away for me!” Gajeel’s head rose up a little at this, as he stared back at her reddened face with wide eyes. He seemed a bit taken aback by the outburst.

“Wow…” He blinked. “Okay…” He replied with a pause. “Is that what this is about?” He then questioned, making Levy move her head to the side again, so that she didn’t have to look at him. She was quiet for a moment and Gajeel resorted to watching her breathe, his eyes fixated on the rise and fall of her naked breast.

Levy could feel the blush in her cheeks and neck only growing as she suddenly felt very foolish for getting upset. What kind of a night was this? Here she was finally getting her chance to be with him and now she was blowing it over what? Being jealous over random, faceless women, whom she had never even seen? Who was she to be jealous anyways? It wasn’t as if this night was supposed to mean anything for either of them. They both knew what was really going on here, almost as if it was an unspoken agreement. This was a one-night stand, because both of their lives didn’t dare allow room for the other. So, in truth, there really was no logic in dwelling over anything that happened between them during these hours. Levy knew all of this and yet she still found it difficult to not become invested, as if this could somehow mean more.

She closed her eyes at her own stupidity, letting out a small quivering breath. Her body was starting to become cold with the emptiness she could feel building up inside. She felt like she had ruined everything and she wanted to crawl into a ball and just hide away from it all. That was until she felt something wet against her breast.

Levy opened her eyes quickly and looked down to see Gajeel, moving his tongue over her skin with eyes closed. He moved it down, sliding it over her nipple before bringing his whole mouth over her breast for a moment. Levy’s chest immediately heaved at the warmth as she could feel his tongue swirling over her. Her mouth opened to breathe a little as the heat in her face grew tenfold. She arched her back some as she felt the edges of his teeth a little, before he opened his eyes and made eye contact with her intensely. She couldn’t look away as she watched him lift his mouth up and off of her with eyes still glued to hers. His body was rising up some as his hands were moving out of hers so that she was no longer pinned down.

“Yer not wrong about me…” He started seriously as Levy watched him back away from her some, his head lowering some to kiss the space between her breasts. “But I can promise you one thing.” He continued as his large hands rested on either side of her waistline, practically consuming her. “You are my favorite.” He added as he kissed her again, but this time it was lower on her stomach. Her muscles were responding to the path he was making over her, as he continued to kiss down.

“You’re an ass.” She managed to choke out in a weak voice, as her eyes closed from the feeling of his kisses getting lower on her abdominals. She heard him laugh his unique laugh at her, but she was no longer watching him, as her head moved back. She could hear and feel the movement of Gajeel edging his way down.

“And that’s why.” Gajeel spoke in a low voice, as Levy suddenly felt a large finger rest over the
center between her thighs over her panties. She let out a small gasp as Gajeel held his finger there, moving it in soft circling motions, applying more pressure to the wet fabric as he was one again amazed by her warmth.

“Gajeel…” She spoke his name in a slight moan; her arm was going up and over her eyes, with the back of her wrist. Her other hand slapped down onto the mattress as her fingers gripped into the sheets. Gajeel’s own face was heating up from the feel of her, the wetness was seeping through and it was beginning to drive him mad. He was soon slipping his finger underneath the fabric, so he could feel her first hand. Levy was moaning louder at the feel of his finger pushing inside of her. Her back arched greatly, as it slid in deeper. He could see her body squirming. Her face was bright red and cringing, her one hand still over her eyes, gripping at her forehead as the other was still digging at the mattress. He could feel her tensing.

“Damn it Levy.” He was gasping, as his own chest was beginning to pant from her reactions. His leg was killing him, but he just didn’t care as all his thoughts centered on her and what she felt like it, her heat all-consuming. He was edging his way over the bedside, the arm he did have around her turning her some with him. His feet were stepping over the floor all while he continued to work inside her. He growled slightly at his own movement, but he didn’t stop what he was doing. If anything, it just made him move a bit more rapidly, until finally he pulled his finger out and away quickly, making Levy gasp from the sudden absence as he quickly wrapped both of his arms around her legs roughly. He yanked her small form towards him, angling her so that his head would be comfortably between her legs once he got lower.

Levy hardly had time to prepare for any of Gajeel’s plans as he positioned her to his liking. She was still on the high from what he had managed to stir inside. Her mind was scrambling to keep up, as she caught her breath. It had been far too long since anyone had pleased her and she could hardly make sense of what was going on as Gajeel’s fingers wrapped around the rim of her panties by each leg. There was no permission as he slowly began to peel them off of her, from either side. Pulling the underwear down her legs with ease and clear off of her first foot, followed by the other.

Levy lifted her hand up and off of her face, just to look down at him as he tossed them aside. He caught her stare with one of his own, the smallest hints of a smirk among his lips, before he started to move his body down to his knees. Levy let her head fall back as her eyes moved up towards the ceiling in bewilderment. Everything was falling far out of her control, as his arms wrapped around both of her thighs. He gave her one last tug near the edge of the bed, so that he could reach her properly, before his tongue was pressing up against her inner thigh.

Levy’s head fell back a little farther, her mouth opening some with a light inhale, as her eyes just dazed over, at the spot of the ceiling she was staring at, above her. His teeth were beginning to scrape at the skin tentatively and she could feel a rattle of anticipation for what she knew he was about to do next. Her fingers clasped around the sheets of the mattress, as she braced just in time for his fangs to latch into her. She threw her head back with a small cry of agony, despite her preparation. She gripped the sheets with all of her might as Gajeel began to suck and prod on the sensitive flesh.

Once again, she could feel the pain breaking through her as she continued to gasp out from it. Her blood was pumping fast, making her body temperature rise greatly. Then just when she didn’t think she could stand it any longer, he finally let her go. She eased in exhaustion from the release of pain, as he began to run his tongue back over the sore spot of her inner thigh. He kissed over it gently as if apologizing again, before moving his head, his focus shifting.

Levy could feel the atmosphere of his breath, as he moved in closer to her center. She was still trying to recover from the bite, when she felt the sweep of his devious tongue very delicately. Her panting
body froze at the feeling of it, out of shock as he teased her with the lightness of its wet touch. All of her muscles felt like they were clenching as even her toes curled upon the movement of his tongue returning, worming its way between her, inside and into an all-encompassing warmth. She felt him swirling within her, tasting and dragging his tongue over her and she could hardly stand it. Her back had completely arched up and off of the bed, as her hips swayed from the ecstasy. Her eyes were closed as her head moved back; her breathing was rapid as she began to moan. She had no control, as she allowed herself to get lost in it all. Time felt uncertain, as she couldn’t fathom any of what was going on.

“Ah… fuck Levy…” She heard Gajeel gasp as he pulled away from her for a brief second. She couldn’t speak, as there was no oxygen left, or so she thought until she felt his finger pushing back into her. His mouth was back over her with it, making her twitch from the long-lost need of this sensation that she was now so overcome with. She could somehow manage to make more noise, her voice much louder as she became a casualty to Gajeel’s prowess. All her bearings were evaporating quickly as she began to feel herself on the edge, through fits of spasms.

“Gajeel…!” She called out his name through her gasping breaths.

“No, you don’t.” He suddenly spoke as if already knowing. He stopped all motions and pulled away from her. Levy’s body practically fell from the release. All of the tension she had just experience was now lifting off of her in waves, as she could finally catch her breath. Gajeel was dragging his way up and off of his knees, onto his feet slowly with a heavy groan. “You can’t be spent just yet shrimp.” He spoke with a grin at her. Levy looked over at him, her mouth opened as she panted; his hands were gripping her knees. She could feel him leaning his body into hers; he was still between her thighs. Positioning his body so that she could feel his arousal pushing against her, but he was still wearing his boxers. Her face was reddening with the pulse that moved though her. Her own heart in her ears, as she shifted her eyes off of the arrogant look he was dawning. She quite honestly didn’t know how much more of this she could take. She was already tired; her body not having the stamina to withstand the pleasure that he was putting her through. It had been far too long for her.

“I will be, if you keep this up…” She uttered, her voice light as she matched eyes with him.

Gajeel held her stare for a minute, before his sights began to travel downwards, over her shuddering body sprawled out before him, completely revealed. He took in the soft swell of her curves and the white glow of her skin. He searched over the fluent line of her petite frame and each feminine characteristic that made her who she was. His eyes shot back up to her face, taking in the simplistic, yet unmatched beauty of her features. He could feel the pull she had over him, as his eyes finally landed back over her large hazel ones. His abdominal muscles were clenching as another part of him was throbbing once again with persistence. He had been holding this off for a while now; throughout each venture they had, that desire had never once wavered, as everything about Levy seemed to be a constant battle of restraint for him.

His yearning for her, was unlike anything he had ever experienced before. With her, he hadn’t wanted to jump right into sex. He had actually wanted to experience and explore every bit of her first. Something that was very uncharacteristic for him, as he normally, only ever had the one interest when it came to women; that interest only being his own. Although his intentions were selfish, he had grown quite experienced and well acquainted on how to handle them. Most women seemed to find enjoyment in what he was able to do for them. Pleased by his rough and normally unaffectionate approach. He had a dominating personality in general and there weren’t many who could combat it properly. They would all just surrender to it instead, with little to no fight, because they found satisfaction in letting him take complete control. This was another reason why Gajeel found Levy to be so fascinating.
She was everything he wasn’t, quite literally presented in physical form. She had softer and lighter features to defy his darker, much harder ones. Her presence was welcoming, where as his was threatening. She had, had little to no issue, in denying him from minute one, despite being intimidated. Even when allowing him control, she still fought him in a sense, even now. She didn’t hide behind her fears or insecurities; she was open about them, but she didn’t let them hinder her actions.

Often times, Gajeel found it hard to grasp the concept of such a human being like her even existing. She carried on so hopeful. Free of the weight, that humanity’s sins could drape over her at any second, so naïve to the evils of the world, almost like they just couldn’t touch her. She seemed blind to them. It was the only possible explanation, as to why she could ever find, even a shred of goodness in him. Especially after seeing what he was capable of. He had never met anyone else who could match him step for step and yet, deny him as much as she could. She was a challenge on so many levels and now that he was finally with her, he knew he was losing.

The stare she held over him was calling forth his instinct. They both had been waiting long enough.

“Guess I shouldn’t keep you waitin’ then?” Gajeel finally spoke; a slight smirk over his lips as he stood up straight. Then he took a step back, away from the bed. Levy’s eyes widened as she watched his hands reach for the rim of his boxer shorts, on either side. Her mouth fell open a little, as her eyebrows raised up and she quickly shifted up some, to sit more upright, so that she could see. Gajeel paused at her movement, his smirk only widening as he took her in, with mild disbelief. “Oi’ little anxious there, shrimp?” Levy’s cheeks flushed noticeably redder, as her eyes darted back up to his face, with a crossed brow.

“Just take them off Gajeel.” She replied, her voice frustrated, her eyes moving off of him. His brow rose considerably at the command. It hadn’t been the response he had expected from her again… Although her eyes and face still showed her shyness, she wasn’t willing to put up, with anymore of his procrastinating. He stood there, taking in the heed of her warning, considerably turned on by it. He could actually feel his own nerves jumping on him. Just a little, as he felt a little put off, by her taking charge for the moment, but he didn’t plan on disobeying.

“You should get paid to say that…” He muttered as this was the second-time, Levy was demanding he strip in front of her and it was equally as hot as the first time.

He began to pull the shorts down carefully; his eye on her as she had her head turned away from him still, refusing to look. Her arms were wrapped around her knees as she sat on the bed.

He had to be careful, what with his bad leg. Keeping his balance was a bit of a chore, as he finally managed to free himself of his last piece of clothing. His feet stepping free of the shorts that were now on the floor; he stood back up straight and looked back over at Levy. She still wasn’t looking at him, almost as if she were afraid, but he wasn’t, not by any means. In fact, his smirk only grew into a full out grin, as he began to lean forward.

His palms graced the bed, sliding down the mattress on either side of Levy’s body, his face and upper body coming towards her, gaining her attention. She looked to him with wide eyes and red cheeks. Caught off guard, as he closed in on her, with his infamous smirk. She had started moving away from him, her back falling back down onto the bed as Gajeel brought his body hovering over hers and then she felt it. The length of what was between his legs, sliding up her inner thigh, with his forward motion as he pushed against her. Levy’s eyelids lowered as Gajeel matched her stare, her mouth was slightly agape as she took a cautious breath. Gajeel’s smirk was fading, as the feel of her skin against his own, was making it hard for him to concentrate on anything other than her heated expression.
“What’s a matter?” He questioned seriously as he continued to move more into her. “This is what you wanted.” He added definitively. They both could feel the pressure of his erection, as he pushed it right up against her center, the warmth beginning to spread as he kept it there in place.

“Yes…” Levy uttered nervously as if troubled. Her head shifted back a little further and Gajeel couldn’t with stand the sound of her weak voice, as he brought his mouth over hers hard, kissing her deeply. The wetness of their kiss was making up for the fact that they were not yet, one. Gajeel pulled his lips off of her, watching her pant as he rocked against her opening. “Levy…” He was starting to say when her hands slapped over his shoulders alarmingly, making his eyes widen.

“Gajeel wait!” She interrupted, tapping his shoulders delicately with her fingers. Gajeel stopped all of his movements, as he could see the urgency in her.

“What…” He questioned deeply confused by the break in tension.

“Do you have protection?” She asked him rapidly.

“Protection?” Gajeel repeated dumb founded. He paused taking in what she had just said for a whole thirty seconds, before it finally registered in his one tracked brain what she was actually saying.

She wanted to know if he had protection, because she wanted to use it and why wouldn’t she? It was a reasonable request in truth, but for some reason it hadn’t even crossed Gajeel’s mind up until the moment she had mentioned it. Almost as if he had imagined his night with her as being far too spontaneous for that. Not that this night wasn’t spontaneous enough, but he also found her request to be a hindrance. If it had been anyone else, it would have been second nature for him to be prepared, as he didn’t normally take chances in these situations. But with Levy, he hadn’t been concerned about risk.

Levy was narrowing her eyes on him, as he hadn’t said anything for a while, too lost in thought to speak.

“Is this going to be an issue?” She asked, becoming genuinely concerned. Gajeel’s eyes snapped back to hers. She seemed to be fretting about this, as if they wouldn’t be able to carry on with their night, if he wasn’t prepared. He knew she didn’t have any sort of protection herself or else she wouldn’t have been asking him. And he could tell by her expression, that she wouldn’t be willing to continue on without it either. It was disappointing to say the least… He would have preferred to just forgo the matter entirely, but he knew that wasn’t fair. He wouldn’t have been the one risking anything by being with her, like she would be, by being with him. A man who had been with ‘countless women’ as she had put it.

“No…” He answered her reassuringly, shaking his head. “Not an issue at all shrimp.” He groaned as his body started to rise up, back onto his feet. “Just… lemme check… ”

He was standing up straight now, his feet back on the floor before the bed. He was scratching at the back of his large mane, as he thought for a minute, glancing around the room. Levy stayed down on the bed, her eyes darting over to his standing form. Her cheeks reddening as she took a peek at his full naked body in front of her. She could see the defined path from his chest, to his abdominal muscles as they led down into the line of his waist and further below. Her eyes shot back up to the ceiling with disbelief, after getting her first full eyeful of him and her heart pounded from it. She then closed them tightly for a moment, swallowing hard as she heard Gajeel speak again.

“Wait… There it is.” He was saying as he turned around. She could hear his feet padding the floor as he bent down with a pain filled growl. He had found his discarded pants on the ground, reaching for his wallet out of the back pocket.
“Yea… Here we go…” He mumbled with a groan as he stood back up. Levy stole another glance as he had his back turned. She was able to get a full look at the arch of his back, her eyes following the jagged shape of his dark feathered mane, as it fell down between his shoulder blades and stopped just short of his finely shaped butt. Her cheeks were still pink, before she glanced away for a second time. She could hear the noise of the wrapper and she could only guess that he had found protection and was now putting it on. She heard him turn around after a minute, as her wooden floor creaked under his weight, before he was stepping back towards the bed. “Got it covered shrimp…” He paused. “Literally…” He added the last part under his breath as he turned his head to the side, awkwardly. Levy looked over to his face, she could no longer see below his waist from her position, thankfully, as he had stepped a little too close to the bed.

“Sorry… If this isn’t what you wanted…” She responded forlornly, her timid eyes glancing back up and away from him.

Gajeel turned back towards her, noticing the way she avoided his gaze as his stare cut back into her out of disbelief. Sure, he hadn’t exactly been interested in using protection, but it didn’t matter to him that much. He was used to it anyways.

His face was becoming hot as he looked over her naked body, while she sat there wrapped up in her own worries once again. She hadn’t any clue what she did to him each and every time he looked at her. He could feel the muscles in his forearms tensing as if angered by her ignorance. It infuriated him to no end that she didn’t seem to get it, even after all of the times he had blatantly told her.

Within seconds Gajeel was acting, catching Levy off guard, before she could move. She had been too distracted and Gajeel, too fast, as he was back over her on the bed, forcefully shoving her down with a locked grip on both of her arms. The pain from his stitches shot down his entire leg, but he completely ignored it as they crashed down onto the mattress, first her, then him. He was seething with frustration as his red eyes narrowed over her wide fearful ones. Her chest was rising and falling rapidly, as Gajeel held her arms in front of it.

“You really think I care?!” He barked as he let her go, like he was tossing her arms away. His hands came slapping down onto the mattress, on either side of her shoulders. She could feel his breath moving against her face, as his hair hung around them, his nose inches from hers. “Levy…” He growled fiercely with an intense and steely stare. Levy could feel his hot, bare flesh pressed up all against her own. Their bodies overlapping and touching in more places, than they had yet too that whole night. “I just want you.” He stated roughly as he was rolling his body more into hers, in such a way that she could once again, feel his arousal moving against her thigh. He was pushing his face past her cheek, so that his lips were near her ear. Her breath hitched as she could feel him swelling against her skin. “I want to fuck you.” He growled, his voice rising a little, as he rocked into her again.

Levy’s chest was tightening as her eyelids fell shut, her arms had reached up around him. Her mouth opened to breathe, her chin rising so that her own lips were now nearing his heavily pierced ear. Some of his wild hair was falling over her chest. She opened her eyes, once she felt him push into her once more. He was now nearing her center and she felt like she was already beginning to sweat.

“I want you too…” She answered softly. Gajeel could feel her breath against his ear; its warmth matching the warmth between her legs.

“Fuck…” He cursed breathlessly as he rocked over her again, testing the heat that radiated off of her with a thrust. He was still completely blown away by it and hesitant to push any further as if it overwhelmed him.

“Gajeel…” She managed to say his name; her voice was sweet with desire and a hint of fear. His
throat was drying up at the sound of anticipation coming from her. He was completely losing his grip as his heart pounded, the pulse resounding through him, making his blood pump faster. He couldn’t with stand it any longer, as he finally pressed himself up against her, no pulling back this time.

Levy’s eyes slammed shut as she felt the pressure of his length, trying to squeeze between her legs. She was quivering from the oncoming brunt of it, as she inhaled deeply, her stomach tingling. Her head fell and her back began to arch as she let out a small cry of pain, as he forced his way in. She finally felt the give of him slipping inside. Her face was on fire from the amount of heat that was transpiring between them as she clenched around him.

“Levy…” He breathed between pants, hesitating to move much further as he raised his trembling body up and off of hers some, so he could look down at her. She was quivering more than he was. “Shit…” He cursed. Sweat had formed on her brow as her eyes were sealed shut tightly, her face cringing some as she bit down on her lip. She was really tight around him, to the point where he was trying to move slowly enough, so she could adjust and not be in so much pain. He groaned as he closed his eyes with a thrust forward. He was gaining some momentum from her wetness, sliding deeper. His face was going red as that heat swallowed him. His mouth opened as his chest heaved, sucking in the air as he pushed his whole length into her with one last jolt. Levy let out another cry with her head flying back as her whole body shook from the size as he completely overtook her. She was moaning some in slight agony, as she started adjusting around him.

“Sorry…” He breathed, knowing he had hurt her. He too was already beginning to sweat from the constraint. She was so freaking tense; he could feel all of her muscles gripping him as he tried to coax her into easing some. It was hard to even move for the moment, as he was too stricken with how she felt. He breathed, taking it in. He watched as Levy began to shake her head; her eyelids still sealed shut.

“No…” She uttered out with a pant. “Don’t be sorry…” She managed to say; she opened her eyes and moved her head back up to look at him. Gajeel could see the haze of lust in her stare, driving him to surrender to her completely. He could no longer be sympathetic to anything he did to her. His body carrying on recklessly out of his instinctive need to embrace all that he had ever wanted, all that she was.

Levy took in another shuddering breath as she felt the absence of Gajeel’s length disappear as he pulled out of her. Her heart pounded as she braced for the impact of him once again pushing between her. The pressure much more forceful. Her fingers began to dig into him, from the movement of him inching inside of her. The weight of his much larger frame was falling against her own, as she could feel him swelling, filling her completely as he wrapped an arm under her back. His chest was pushing over hers as he too panted. His body meeting hers and matching her temperature. Their lower halves pressing into one another with velocity, as they both gasped to breathe.

Levy could feel her body stiffening, as her stomach clenched around that, which she had so badly been missing. The pain of the satisfaction, equaling that of the sensation. She felt almost limp as Gajeel was pulling out of her again, but only to once again move back into her, at a much faster momentum. She could feel her own warm wetness seeping down, allowing him to move as he pleased. His body moving with purpose as he took control in an almost animalistic like manner, rolling in and out of her roughly, making her whole form ache from the pleasure and exhaustion as he kept at it. She felt like she was becoming disoriented, as she tried her best to keep in time with his movements, but it was difficult. His body was moving at an overwhelming pace, until he finally slowed some and took hold of her waist.

“Levy…” He was saying with a groan, gaining her attention.
Levy opened her eyes, she could feel the sweat stinging at her eyes, moving off of her hot cheeks and neck. Gajeel was suddenly shifting her. She could hardly keep up with it, as he twisted them around, so that he was on his back. Placing her on top of him, so that her body was forced to fall over his own. His arousal still sliding up and into her, as gravity let her glide back down and onto him. His upper body was rising up to meet her torso as his hands fastened to her hips tightly. His wet mouth was pressing over her breast as he continued to thrust into her, with his hip movements. She now understood, that he had probably done this so she could better match his speed and so she heeded to his movements, her own hips swaying with him, back and forth. She could really feel their connection now, as he pushed up into her in just the right way each time. Her head fell back as she began to moan out his name. She was rocking with him, both of them matching rhythm as they came together, sinking against the other with a deep desperation to quell their aching desire for the other.

Gajeel slapped his arms around her midsection, wrapping her heated flesh up against his own, as if he couldn’t bear to have any part of her away from him. Levy was gasping and crying out, as she felt her muscles tightening in his fastened grip. She was on the edge, her nails dug into him as her chin lowered over his shoulder, her face cringing. She was clawing down his back as she felt one last more heave of him pushing into her for release. She felt dizzy in the midst of heat, as her body gave way, each muscle constricting into a fit of spasms, throughout her whole form. Gajeel felt her clenching around him, the sound and feeling of it, driving him too his own release as he pulsed through her.

Slowly, the tension between them began to disappear as they both clung to each other panting, their bodies radiating the now diminishing heat. Levy had her arms over Gajeel’s shoulders, the side of her head pressed up against his own. His strong arms were still embracing her waist. They both lightly began to pull apart enough to look at each other.

Gajeel was still breathing heavily, as he looked into her half-lidded eyes; some of her hair was clinging to her damp forehead as he took her in. She looked completely spent and at a loss for words, as her chest heaved. He couldn’t help, but let a tiny smirk spread over his lips, as he fastened his grip on her once again, before suddenly pulling her down with him. Levy let out a small gasp, as they both slammed down onto the mattress, her basically landing over him then rolling down onto the mattress beside him. She blinked as he turned towards her for a moment.

“Gajeel…!” He laughed his unique laugh at her, before slowly moving his body back up stiffly. His legs starting to edge over the bed as she watched him with disbelief.

“Hang on shrimp.” He spoke as he started to get up with a painful groan. Levy looked away, as it dawned on her what he was doing.

She turned her head away, her body slowly turning with it as her cheeks began to glow pink. She could hear Gajeel’s feet padding away towards her bathroom, for clean-up. She slowly reached for the blanket of her bed, pulling it over her waist as she lay on the bed, face turned towards the wall. Her head was swirling with wonder and confusion, as she clasped her hands up together by her face. Her body was still shuddering from it all, as exhaustion began to creep over her.

She could hear the noise of Gajeel walking around in the bathroom growing faint as sleep began to haze over her. Her eyelids grew heavy as she stared at the barren white wall of her apartment. All of her thoughts were beginning change form, as she began to teeter on the edge of dreaming. She could just make out the sound of Gajeel returning. The bed dipping as his large body settled over it beside her, making her eyelids flutter as she fought to remain coherent.

Gajeel was turning towards her, his own lower half being pushed under the covers as he noticed her still form. He could see the movement of her steady breathing, as his eyes followed the line of her
spine. He was searching over her white skin until they once again landed over that strange tattoo of hers. He took in the shape of it with perplexity, trying to decide if he could tell what exactly it was supposed to be. His hand idly reached for it, as if mesmerized by the flowing nature of the symbol. He felt Levy shudder, just as his finger traced over the line of it, that was when he knew for sure she had been falling asleep.

“Levy…” He paused. “What is this…?” He questioned. Levy could hear his voice, his image taking on a strange appearance in her head, as he had now become a mixture of dream and reality, but she still somehow knew, that he was referring to her tattoo.

“It’s a fairy.” She spoke softly. “Some say… That fairies have tails.” She continued, her voice was coming out dreamily, as Gajeel’s finger slid up what he could now see, was the tail. “Nobody knows for sure though… but that’s part of the fun of it…” She paused, sighing half-heartedly as the words escaped her. “It’s like an eternal adventure…” She managed to get out weakly, her words lazy as sleep continued to claim her.

Gajeel watched her for a moment, staring at the symbol. His hand dropping down, as he took in her words with a mixture of curiosity and misunderstanding. He slowly let his head sink down onto the pillow, as he began to hear her breathe in rhythm, no longer awake. His hand slowly slid over her waist as he pushed himself against her back, engulfing her with his size. His eyes fixated on the white fairy inked over her back until he too, became too tired to keep his eyes open.

Chapter End Notes

(Could use a little love)
(why can’t you get enough?)
(Could use, could use a little love)
(Why can’t you get enough?)
(could use…)

Short days, long nights tangled up with you
I don’t wanna move
Your eyes don’t lie
And if I needed proof, that body tell the truth

Your body is a blessing
Don’t know if I deserve it
Before round two, I’ve got a question for you babe

If it ain’t love
Why does it feel so good?
Why does it feel so good?
If it ain’t love
Why does it feel so good?
Why does it feel so good?

(Could use a little love)
(why can’t you get enough?)
(Could use, could use a little love)
(Why can’t you get enough?)
(could use…)

On the top of my tongue
The flavor of your skin lingers on my lips
Each time we dine
We do it again, again and again, ooh

Your body is a blessing, oh
What’d I do to deserve it?
Before round three, I’ve got a question for you baby

If it ain’t love
Why does it feel so good?
Why does it feel so good?
If it ain’t love
Why does it feel so good?
Why does it feel so good?
Tell me what it is
If it ain’t love
Oh, babe
Why does it feel so good?
If it ain’t love
Then what is it?
Why does it feel so good?

(Could use a little love) Aw, yeah
(Why can’t you get enough?)
(Could use, could use…)

You know soon that you walk in, it goin’ up, goin’ up
Slow it down for me, girl, we ain’t gotta rush it, we ain’t gotta rush it
Always a movie, we ain’t sayin’ much
Baby, I’m just your type; I know what bad girls like
But I’ll confess tonight
Your body is a blessing, oh yeah
What’d I do to deserve it?
(Short days, long nights)
Short days and long nights, yeah

If ain’t love
(why) Why does it feel so good?
(Does it feel) Why does it feel so good?
(So good?) Tell me what it is
If it ain’t love
(Why) Why does it feel so good?
(Does it feel) Why does it feel so good?
So good? Yeah, yeah

If it ain’t love
(why) What is it?
(So good?)
Why does it feel so good?
If it ain’t love
(Why) Then what is it?
(Does it feel) What is it?
(so good?)
Why does it feel so good?

“If Ain’t Love” By Jason Derulo

A/N: Feel free to ask me questions at any time. I will respond and I am not above answering for certain decisions I made while writing this. This chapter took me a long time to write back in the day while I was working on it. And I mean months!! I was very stumped by it for a while and very determined for it to be a certain way. I wanted to have intimacy, but also portray growth and development between these two. Show the different parts of who they were to each other. Have them get to know more about one another. This is a very critical part of Gajeel and Levy's story, because it is about their relationship. Anyways... I'm still not sure if I achieved what I was after, but either-way I still poured my blood into it. And I do think it still reads a bit more differently than your average 'smut' piece. One thing is for sure, I will never write something like this probably ever, again.

And Thank You! Thank you for reading!
Breath

Chapter Summary

A mysterious fire has happened and Gray still hasn't returned. Erza calls on Elfman to help her investigate it. Lisanna comes to Lucy with a concern, but instead of solving the issue she is introduced to Loke. Lucy worries for her friends and Loke does his best to ease her mind. Levy wakes up, realizing that everything that happened was not a dream. Gajeel isn't dealing with things in the manner he wishes too and lastly... Levy drops some bad news on him without realizing it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Monster

Chapter 8: Breath

It was early in the morning when a black vehicle with tinted windows came rolling into the warehouse yard, the sound of gravel crunching in its wake. The sky was a gradient of blues, grays and pinks as the sun had just begun its ascend, the curve of it just barely peeking over the tops of skyscrapers. Its rays were flooding through each space in the backdrop, creating a heavy glare for the driver as he drove his way between rows of buildings.

He glanced up into the rearview mirror, as his eyes narrowed on the man he could see in the backseat. The heavy smoke from this man’s cigar was stinging the driver's eyes. He was a heavyset, stout gentleman with large almost fish like lips, a very pointed nose and flared nostrils. He had on a pair of brown tinted shades and a bright yellow pin striped suit, that made him look over the top. He had one large hand up to his ear as he was on the phone, while the other brought the cigar back down from his mouth, as he breathed out another large puff of smoke.

This was the driver’s boss, Banaboster Goodrich, owner of the Twilight Ogre Casino and today he was in a foul mood. For two reasons, one being that it was so early in the morning and the second being, that his right-hand man had yet to make an appearance and was now essentially late for their meeting.

“What do you mean he’s probably sleeping?!” Banaboster howled into the phone, with great annoyance and his heavy urban accent. “Then wake his ass up!” He shouted next, making the driver wince from the loudness of his yells. He pulled the phone away from his ear, just so he could scream right into the speaker. “I had fun last night too, but I’m still here! And I’m hung over! So that’s no excuse!” Banaboster hollered, as he slammed down his cigar in a large ashtray in the middle section of the backseat. He twisted it angrily, his knuckles were white from the death grip he had on his tiny cell phone. A large vein was pulsing in the middle of his forehead, his face reddening out of extreme rage. “This is fucking important Vinni! If he doesn’t show up, then what the hell was the point of all this!? I don’t wanna hear it! Then you find a way to reach him, cause I’m tired of being under Jose’s
"Ya got me!" He finished before throwing the phone down on the floor of the car, out of extreme anger. “Damn it Thibault!” He snapped, as his boot came slamming down over the discarded phone below his feet. “Where the fuck are you!?" He cursed his foot turning and stomping over it, like a child squishing a bug.

“Sir?” The driver interjected.

“What the hell is it!?” Banaboster raged, his head snapping up.

“There appears to be smoke…” The driver responded, as he began to recognize the large white clouds flowing out from behind the upcoming sets of warehouses. The car was still continuing its steady, slow path through patches of sunlight now loaded with smoke, as they neared their destination.

“What?!” Banaboster gasped. His eyes were widening as his body twisted towards the window, his large hand slapping down on the button that opened it. The window moved down with a buzz, allowing some of the graying puffs to come filtering into the car.

Banaboster’s eyes slammed shut, as he brought a hand up to his throat coughing, his hand pulling the button back up, to put a stop to it immediately. The window clasped back shut just in time, as the smoke was only growing worse by the second. The driver’s vision was becoming deeply impaired, as the two of them could hear the sound of sirens.

“What the hell is going on!?”

“Something must be on fire sir.” The driver answered, as he continued on despite the thickening clouds traveling towards them from one side, between each building.

“Yea, but where is it coming from!?!” Banaboster exclaimed, his head swiveling back and forth from window to window, as the smoke was becoming a much darker veil around them.

“I’m not sure sir, but I think this is my turn… We’re going to be heading right in that direction, so be ready!” The driver warned urgently, as he could just make out the edge of one of the warehouse lots and the graveled path of the road. Banaboster rolled over in the backseat, as the driver made a sharp left, suddenly realizing the road was right on top of them. He accelerated, his teeth griting out of nerve, as they pushed forward into the black, that was now heading right for their front window shield, the sound of sirens was growing much louder. Finally, there was a break in the smoke as they pushed forwards and out of the large black cloud that had blown over them.

The driver hit the brakes, his eyes widening. The wheels of the car kicking up rocks as they came to a screeching halt. Banaboster hit his head on the driver’s side seat as he flew forward.

“S-Sir….” The driver stuttered, his voice a mixture of fear and amazement.

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“What- What is it?” Banaboster choked out, as he rubbed the top of his head, his body shifting back up to look out the front window. His eyes grew tenfold, his jaw dropping as he took in the devastation with horror. His shaking hands began to reach for the handle of the door clumsily, as he couldn’t look away. His body moving out of pure shock, as he stumbled his way out of the car, in what should have been the cool damp morning atmosphere of fall.

Banaboster collapsed to his knees amongst the dust. A thick wave of heat was swallowing all of the moisture from the air around him. The pulsing red flashes of firetrucks were glowing through the fog. Warehouse Thirteen was smiling at him, like a demon that had clawed its way out from the depths of hell, its structure collapsing as the firefighters doused it with their jets. Banaboster could only watch,
his face paling as it and everything inside, was completely engulfed in laughing red flames.

Elfman took another sip of his coffee, the bitter black liquid scolding his gullet on the way down, as he glanced up from the paperwork he had been skimming over. His large fingers engulfing the handle of his tiny mug, as he pushed the bottom of it back down onto the surface of his humorously sized desk. His wide shoulders alone were nearly the width of the furniture, making him stick out in the room like a large gorilla.

A deep wave of sleepiness washed over him as he looked around. His large torso stretching up as he yawned. His arms were reaching back behind his ashen white head. His chair shifted and creaked some as he turned it; the support piece was bending under the weight of him leaning back.

His dark eyes swiveled over the busy room of the station; other officers and detectives were roaming around their desks and their boards, as they went about their day. Phones were ringing; the buzz of conversation was around him as he shifted his gaze towards the large windows that lined the one side of the room. He could see the golden rays of morning filtering their way through the blinds, leaving their pattern to shine over the tiled floor of the department. He let out a breath, glancing down at his phone to read the time.

He was surprised he had yet to hear from Gray; it had been hours since they had gone their separate ways. Hell, their shift was almost over and quite honestly Elfman was exhausted. Neither one of them had anticipated the amount of time it would take for Gray to deal with the other station and their odd leading detective, Ichiya. Elfman felt stuck, as he continued to wait for his partner’s call to no avail. That was until the sound of heels filled his ears, the clicking approaching from behind.

“Elfman.” He heard her deep no nonsense voice say his name. He quickly turned his chair, facing the woman before him with an uncertain expression. Fearful of what she might say, he could feel himself swallowing as his eyes made their path up her form.

She was a beautiful woman, this was basically a given to any person who beheld her. Tall, with long legs and very pronounced curves, even in the dark non-revealing pants suit she was wearing for work attire. She had the top two buttons of her maroon blouse open, allowing her heavy-set chest some breathe room. Her posture was strong and her stance firm with the confidence she possessed, as she stood with feet apart. The only aspect of her that was more intimidating, was her highly critical face. She had a youthful complexion, but her brown eyes contained a wisdom well beyond her years, as though she were a person who was highly planned out. Her features were alluring; from her well defined, yet feminine nose, to the thickness and shape of her exquisite lips, but her most striking attribute was her long silky hair. She had sweeping bangs, while the rest of it cascaded halfway down her back in a deep rich scarlet, as her last name suggested, for this was Erza Scarlett, active captain and Elfman’s boss. Better known as Titania by her underlings, meaning queen, unbeknownst to her of course, because of her strict and poised demeanor.

Elfman could feel his muscles tightening as she held to his nervous stare. Her expression was stoic as a moment of silence passed between the two of them. Uh oh… Wh-What does she want?! Ugh C’mon Elfman! Relax…! Be a man! He was thinking as his eyes scanned back and forth over her calm face. He could feel himself beginning to sweat. Who the hell am I kidding? She’s ten times more manlier than I am! Was his last thought as he bit down, anticipating what she was possibly going to say. What he wasn’t expecting was for her lips to curl up into a slight smile, as she offered her hand out towards him, which he now noticed was holding a plate.

“There’s cake in the break room.” Erza spoke, making Elfman nearly pass out as all of the tension he had just been feeling vanished, leaving him cold. “You should get some.” She added in her commanding voice.
Elfman closed his eyes, as all of the air slid out of his body in one relieving breath, before he looked back up at her. She now had the fork end in her mouth, her expression blissful, as she had taken a bite while he wasn’t looking. Elfman glanced down at the cake on her plate, it had fluffy white, whipped cream frosting, with large red strawberries draped over it. That’s her favorite… Wonder who brought it…? Someone trying to get on her good side, no doubt. He thought, before he looked back up at Erza’s face with a relieved smile.

“Nah, that’s okay. You enjoy it though.” Elfman responded as Erza continued to chew her cake, as if in another world where everything was sunshine and rainbows. She swallowed, her cheeks reddening and her eyes gleaming with stars, for a second.

“Okay! Suit yourself.” She replied cheerfully, as she turned away from him and headed towards her office, just a few feet away. Elfman watched her leave, once again sighing as he saw her close the door and take a seat in her desk chair through the windows of the small room.

Erza sat herself down in her swiveled chair, her eyes landing over the papers scattered across her desk as she set her plate, with fork on top, down next to them. She kept her gaze downwards as she instinctively reached for a pair of dark glasses off to one side of her large desk. She put them on, her eyes already skimming over some of the words; her expression was once again very serious. Her hand was slowly reaching towards her fork after a few minutes, her eyes staying glued downwards until the phone rang.

Erza paused, her head going up so she could read the name that scrolled across the device’s tiny screen. Her eyebrows pushed together in concern as she hesitantly reached for the receiver. She took a moment to let it ring as if perplexed, before suddenly grabbing it and pushing the phone to her ear.

“Hello?” She questioned.

Elfman had just turned his chair back towards his computer monitor, when the sound of a slamming door made his head perk back up in alarm. He could hear Erza’s heels once more, before her voice resounded.

“Elfman? Where’s Gray?!” She questioned, her tone full of urgency. Elfman turned back to face her, just as she was putting on her coat.

“Ugh…” He began scratching his jaw, with his brow mangled. “He hasn’t made it back yet. He was filling out a report with the other station.” Erza was looking at him, walking near.

“Well come on. Get your coat. I need you to come with me.” She ordered, making Elfman immediately jump to his feet as he grabbed the jacket draped over his chair.

“Uh… Yea sure, but where we goin?” He asked as he put it on over his shoulders, following her as she began to walk.

“There’s been a fire.” Erza answered, her voice grave, leaving Elfman to worry if it was what he was suspecting upon hearing the word ‘fire’.
Lucy could hear the faint sounds of something pounding, disrupting the flow of her sleep. The constant thudding was only getting louder the more she tried to ignore it. Her eyes squeezed tighter as she desperately tried to get the dream she had been in the midst of back, but it just wasn’t happening as it had already shattered upon the realization of reality. Her brow furrowed in question as she finally cracked one eye open, immediately regretting it. The light was hitting her face and she could feel the pain beginning to pulse. She let out a moan as she slowly began to turn her stiff body over in the bed, the thudding now not only on her door, but in her head as well.

“What do youuu wanttt?” She questioned groggily, to the noise at the door as if it could somehow answer. She could feel the dryness in her throat, she felt very dehydrated as she lifted her aching body into a sitting position. She blinked with a heavy yawn, her eyes half opened as the knocking continued. “I’m coming!” She finally yelled, her hand going up to her head, at the loudness of her own voice.

“Oww…” She muttered as she closed her eyes for a second. She took a second to regain her wit, as she felt very disoriented, before finally shoving her legs over the side of her bed. Her feet landed on the plush carpeting, her body rising up lazily. She stood for a moment; the room felt like it was slowly turning around her. She blinked a few times, before realizing that she was only wearing her underwear and no top.

“Oh…” she spoke, glancing around her room until she finally found a discarded tank top. She bent down and grabbed it, slipping it on as another knock went off. “Coming…!” She spoke again, before shuffling her feet towards the door. “Wonder who the hell this could be…?” She muttered completely annoyed.

For the first time in Lucy’s life, she was hung over and she didn’t very much care for it at all. She had been out drinking before, but never had she consumed to the extent of feeling like this the next day. The events of last night were a bit blurry and coming back to her in pieces, as a wave of slight nausea washed over her. Finally, she had made it to the door, just as another knock sounded off.

“I’m here!” She snapped at the person behind the door, as she began to unlock it. She opened it, her head peeking out from behind the frame, as she kept her lower half hidden. “What do you want?!” She raged, expecting to find someone selling something or handing out religious pamphlets. Lucy’s expression changed from annoyed to regretful confusion, upon seeing who stood before her.

“Oh…?” Being the only word that managed to stumble its way out of her mouth.

The girl was around the same age as Lucy, with similar height as well. Her skin was very fare and her hair was a short flaxen white, that framed her face nicely. Her eyes were large and ovule shaped, their color a deep navy that shined with warmth. These were the eyes and hair of a Strauss, as this was Lisanna Strauss, Elfman and Mira’s little sister. She had also recently become Natsu’s significant other. She was wearing a blue tank top and jeans, with a light jacket over her shoulders as she looked over Lucy with sorrowful eyes.

“Lucy... I’m sorry for waking you up.” Lisanna uttered, her tone sounding earnest, as her eyebrows pushed together in worry. She glanced down quickly and then back up with her mouth falling open, like there was something more she needed to say. Her weight was shifting from one foot to the other in discomfort, as her hands fiddled together nervously.

“Lisanna…?” Lucy whispered, becoming concerned with how the girl looked. “What’s wrong?” Lucy asked, as she pushed open her door all the way without thinking, revealing her not so decent lower half.
“Uh… Lucy?” Lisanna started getting a look, before she glanced away embarrassed. She pointed a finger at the blonde’s waist.

“Oh god!” Lucy snapped, her eyes bulging as she moved the door back. “I’m so sorry! I forgot! I’ll go put on some pants!” Lucy called, as Lisanna watched her head disappear behind the door. She could hear the pitter-patter of her steps moving away.

“It’s okay…” Lisanna spoke, truly not bothered by it that much, as she was more preoccupied with whatever else was on her mind.

“No, it’s not! I just flashed you!” She heard Lucy yell from somewhere behind the door, before she could hear the girl returning. Lucy returned now, dawning a pair of pink sweat pants, as she pushed open the door to look more fully at the other girl. “Forgive me… I’m not exactly myself today.”

Lucy replied, running a hand through her frazzled blond hair. Lisanna cracked a weak smile at the other girl, her eyes still looked worried though as she tried to fight whatever it was, that was bothering her.

“I understand… I mean it though… It’s okay…” Lisanna replied, her head looking back down as her smile quickly disappeared. Lucy looked over the girl before her, with a serious face. Lisanna looked truly distraught, her shoulders were upright and her expression anxious.

“So… What’s up? Are… Are you okay?” Lucy questioned timidly. She almost wanted to reach out to the other girl and pull her into a hug, as something was clearly wrong. Lisanna brought her head back up, her eyes narrowing just a little, as if she were trying not to cry.

“Have you… Have you seen Natsu?” She choked out the question, her voice almost breathless. Lucy’s mouth fell open, her eyes widening greatly out of shock. She pulled a hand up by her heart, her fingers closing tightly.

“What…?! No… I thought… I thought he had been with you lately.” Lucy answered. Lisanna shook her head hastily, a deep frown over her lips as she could see the shock all over Lucy’s face, with her own disbelieving one.

“But… But… How can that be? He?! I?!” The blond began to stutter, not understanding what was happening in the slightest. How could neither one of them know where Natsu was? It just wasn’t plausible! The two girls stood there, taking in the silence, worry fueling their imaginations, as they both tried to fathom his sudden disappearance from their lives.

That was until the sound of footsteps could be heard. Lucy’s eyes widened even more, as she realized it was coming from behind her. She watched as Lisanna’s face went from worried, to confusion and then to shock. Her pale complexion was tinting pink as her dark blue eyes shifted to the person who had now appeared over Lucy’s shoulder, with mouth going open out of clear embarrassment. Lucy turned her trembling head, as her own mouth fell open, her large eyes meeting a pair of olive green ones.

Loke smirked confidently at the blond. His white body dripping wet, clad in nothing, but a towel. His thick red hair soaked and mopped over his head. He had one hand holding onto the towel around his waist, while the other reached towards the now, very red-faced girl standing just outside Lucy’s door.

“Hello beautiful, and who might you be?” He asked. Not at all put off by his lack of dress, nor the
two flustered girls standing right before him. There was a brief silence, as Lucy registered another important detail about the night before, that she had somehow completely forgotten about. She could feel her resolve breaking, as she rounded on the very attractive and basically naked man, who stood right next to her.

“What the hell is the matter with you!?!” She exclaimed, waving her arms at him still in shock. Loke just smiled at Lucy as Lisanna spoke next.

“Oh my! I’m so sorry Lucy! So, so sorry! I didn’t know you had company over!” She managed to get out, mortified by the scene before her. She dipped her head in an apology a few times, as she began to back away. “I’m so sorry! I’ll just be on my way! I didn’t mean to… uh… bother you guys!” Lisanna was uttering, her face still red as she had started to turn and walk down the hall quickly.

“No wait!” Lucy yelled after her, her hand going out. “Lisanna!” Lucy tried again, but Lisanna had already disappeared down the stairs, wanting to get as far away from the awkward situation as possible. “No… Damn it…” Lucy was cursing quietly, as she brought herself back inside the room.

Loke had backed a few steps away from the door as Lucy brought it closed behind her; her expression was one of deep concentration as her sights went downwards. Loke watched her as silence filled the room once again, his head tilting as she paid him no mind. Her eyes were darting back and forth over the floor as she thought about what Lisanna had just revealed to her. Her hand going up and over her mouth as her brow lowered.

I don’t understand… If Natsu hasn’t been with Lisanna this whole time… Then where could he be? She wondered, her heart was pounding as her teeth sunk into her lower lip. Natsu… You’re not in any kind of trouble, are you? She questioned him desperately, her worst fears taking form.

“Lucy…?” Lucy quickly glanced up at the questioning voice of Loke, as he regarded her with concern in his eyes. “Is everything okay…?” He asked, truly interested. She looked over his face, her mouth open like she might say something, but she didn’t know what. It was a hard question to answer, as she really hadn’t any idea if things were okay or not. Her friend may have very well of been missing.

Friend…? The word stood out in her mind as another face, other than Natsu’s popped into her mind. The events of last night were crashing back into her memory, as she suddenly remembered everything. Natsu wasn’t the only friend she hadn’t heard from.

“Levy!” Lucy snapped, her eyes wide. Loke’s eyes also grew at the name.

“Oh yea! Have you heard from her?!” He questioned. Lucy’s eyes went back down as it occurred to her, that she hadn’t even looked at her phone yet. Hell, she didn’t even know what time it was. She had literally just rolled out of bed. “I… I don’t know…” Lucy answered, standing back up straight, with sights aimed downwards.

“Well… Go look.” Loke replied urgently.

“Right!” Lucy exclaimed, wasting no time to walk past him and back into the room as she spotted her phone on the table. She snatched it up quickly looking at the screen, before turning back to Loke with a worried face. “No missed calls.” She told him.

“Is that unusual?” Loke questioned, standing up straight as he still held up his towel, over the nicely defined lines of his hips. Lucy noticed the time, but that didn’t really matter much, seeing as Levy was normally an early riser. She began to scroll for the girl’s number in her phone, bringing it up to
her ear, as she found it and hit call.

“it is, when I asked her to get right back to me.” Lucy replied as she rested it against her cheek. She began to hear it ringing, her eyes going back up to Loke, her cheeks reddening. “Put some clothes on!” She quietly chided at him, making him grin at her as she looked away from him again with a shake of her head.

Loke began to do as he was told with a smirk, grabbing his discarded clothing from last night, as Lucy turned her back to him. She could hear the phone ringing; each time Levy didn’t answer, making her become more and more concerned. She began to picture the big scary man she had seen last night, at the club. The one who had, had all the piercings and kept a steady eye over her tiny best friend. Levy had told Lucy his name, but she couldn’t remember it. All she could really remember, were his terrifying snake-like eyes. Please… Levy… Pick up… Lucy was begging, as her eyelids fell shut. Then suddenly there was a beeping noise to indicate that the phone had gone to voicemail. Damn it! Lucy was cursing in her mind, as she began to hear Levy’s voice.

“Hi! You have reached Levy McGarden’s phone! Sorry I can’t talk right now, but if you leave me your name and number I promise to return your call as soon as possible! Thanks and have a great day!” Lucy waited anxiously for the second beep to sound off and then she began.

“Hey Levy… I know I am probably just overreacting, but… I’m a little freaked out that I haven’t heard from you yet… It’s about ten in the morning and I know you’re normally up by now… Plus I couldn’t help, but notice that your phone is still on, cause it rang, like… A lot… Anyways… I know, I know… I worry too much, but could you please call me back as soon as you get this?! Just to ease my mind! I love you and I’ll probably be calling you again soon, if I don’t hear from you! Okay… bye” Lucy finished forlornly. She hung up the phone and stared at it, she was at a complete loss on what more to do.

“So…” Loke began, making Lucy turn her head to look over her shoulder, at him. He was now wearing the pants and dress shirt from last night, albeit the shirt was a bit more wrinkled than it had been initially. He looked up at her with a serious expression. “This isn’t like her, is it? Or you, for that matter.” He asked, the last part coming out more like a statement. Lucy turned her body towards him, letting out a heavy sigh as she let herself plop down onto the edge of her bed, her eyes going downcast as she still held the phone.

“No definitely not.” She answered. “Everything that happened last night was pretty much out of the norm, for me and Levy.” Lucy replied, leaning forwards some over her legs. She brought an elbow up, over her knee so that she could support her head in it. “Guess that’s why I’m so worried… Cana did say she went somewhere with someone… But I’m just having a hard time believing that… It’s just so… bizarre.” Lucy explained, her eyes narrowing on the last word.

“Well, you went home with someone… Well… I mean, I guess I took you home, but same animal really.” Loke offered with a shrug from his nicely postured shoulders, as he stood with his hands shoved in his pockets. Lucy glanced up at him with her chocolate eyes, taking him in carefully.

“You’re right.” She nodded her head, her cheeks reddening as she glanced away. “And… I’m sorry about this morning. I… uh… kind of… forgot you were here…” She mumbled, scratching her cheek, refusing to look his way, as her eyes rolled around the room. That was until she heard Loke laugh lightly at her; she looked over at him, her eyebrows lowering. “Oh shut up…” She added.

“Didn’t you hear me in the shower?” He asked with a smile, once his laughter died. Lucy just shook her head at him.

“No… I guess I was just too preoccupied with the loud knocking at the door to notice the water
running.” She answered. “Well that… And my head was pounding…” Lucy replied, as she brought a hand up to her forehead. Loke leaned against the wall, his arms folding over his chest.

“Yea… Actually, that was my next question. How are you feeling?” He asked genuinely concerned.

“Well… I’m not going to lie, Loke. Not so great.” She answered dryly.

“So… Do you remember everything…?” He questioned, his voice lowering into a slightly seductive tone, as he smirked at her with an eyebrow up. Lucy could feel her skin beginning to burn at the look he was sending her. There was a soreness and ache in her body, as the images of last night began to fog her mind all at once. Her eyes shifted up towards the ceiling, her mouth hanging open as she could feel her stomach clenching.

“Uh…” She paused. “Yes…” She answered quietly. Her eyes shifting back down towards the floor, as her skin practically began to glow red. Her arms were hanging loosely in front of her.

Loke watched her with a slight chuckle, taking pleasure out of her shy, yet cute reactions. His eyes were once again traveling over her chest and the cleavage he could see hanging out of her dark, loose fitting tank top. He could see a decent amount of skin from the way she was sitting on the bed. His brain was also taking him back to last night, as he thought about how she had looked while not wearing anything. He shifted his gaze back up towards her face, a desire to spend more time with her entering his mind.

“Say… What do you have planned for today, Lucy?” He asked, a hand coming up to his chin. The color in Lucy’s face began to fade, as she looked back up to him for a moment, reading his expression.

“Well…” She began, her hand coming up as she began to look at it and name fingers. “I’ve got to start on my paper, study for an exam, work on some extra credit, stop at the store and pick up my lunches for the week and I have to work later this evening… And…” Her eyes looked up, a finger landing on her chin. “Huh… Feels like I’m forgetting something else…” At this Loke just shook his head and stared at her with a disbelieving expression.

“Man… Sounds like your day is basically packed.” He replied, earning a sigh from the blond.

“It always is…” She answered, before looking back over at him, longingly. “I guess that was why I wanted so badly, to just be someone else for a night… I just wanted a break really… I’ve always got more than I can handle, to deal with… Just… All of the time.” She finished forlornly. Glancing down as her fingers fiddled together

“Well how about this? Do you think you can stomach breakfast?” Loke suddenly questioned, earning Lucy’s attention back on him.

“I think so…?” Her hands dropped. “Why? Did you wanna go out somewhere?” She questioned him perplexed.

“Well no… Actually, I was thinking I could just cook something for you here. Do you have eggs?” Loke asked, making Lucy’s mouth fall open for a second, before she began to shake her head and hands at him.

“Wait, wait wait…! Wait a minute…! You want to cook… for me?” Lucy asked pointing to herself. Loke just shrugged his shoulders, not understanding.

“Yea sure, why not? We’re not really going to have time to do much else considering the day you’ve got in front of you, so this is the least I can do.” Lucy stared at him for a full solid minute with no
words, before she finally nodded her head.

“There are eggs…” She replied softly, her expression becoming deeply saddened. Loke stepped towards her hastily, his hands going out towards her shoulders as he kneeled down before her

“Whoa… Lucy! You okay?! I won’t do it, if you don’t want me too.” He stated, as he moved his hands back down to his sides, but Lucy just shook her head at him. She slowly brought her face back up to meet his much closer one now. A weak smile had crept over her lips.

“No… It’s not that… I just can’t remember the last time someone cooked for me, that’s all… Not since I left home, for sure…” She replied thinking about all of the servants who had taken care of her like a family and then her late mother. Loke smiled warmly at her beautiful face, as he noted the glossiness of her eyes. He set a hand over her shoulder and squeezed it lightly.

“Well trust me…” He spoke softly. “It’s no big deal…” He replied, making her lock eyes with him for few seconds, before he finally stood up and made his way over to the kitchen. Lucy watched him go and listened as he began to speak.

“Besides… I do have some of my own stuff to do today actually. Paperwork mostly.” His voice filtered out from the kitchen as Lucy slowly began to stand up as well.

“Oh yea…?” She replied.

“Yep…” She heard him say from the kitchen, her brow furrowing as a thought occurred to her.

“Hey ya know what?” Lucy began as she made her way over to him. “You know that, I’m in school and stuff, but I don’t know what you do.” She finished, now standing in the doorway. Her one eyebrow rose up in question, as she watched him look around her different covers for the stuff he needed. She pointed to the one, just as he caught her eye.

“Oh…” He replied, before bending down to open it. “I work in law. I’m an attorney.” He added as he pulled out a large frying pan.

“What?!!” Lucy exclaimed as she watched him stand back up.

“Yea…”

“But… But… You’re so young!” She answered, making Loke turn to her with his charming smile.

“Oh, well, ya know…” He shrugged. “My family… They were all lawyers too… So… Here I am…” He answered.

Lucy watched him, his words making her think of her own family and how her dad had tried to pressure her into the family business, as well. How he had wanted her to not bother with college and just to marry someone for alliance purposes, and then work under him for the rest of her life. He had wanted her to take control of the Heartfelia name, with no concern of what she herself, had actually wanted to do with her own future.

He hadn’t been too happy when he had found out that, she had planned to go to school, but he did slowly begin to accept it. Thinking maybe if she got a business degree, it would aid in her running the company successfully. He then tried to help her get into some of the most prestigious business schools he knew of. The issue was, she had already picked out what school she had wanted to go to, and she had zero interest in business.

No… Lucy’s real ambition was to become a writer. To say her father wasn’t too happy when he
found this out, was an understatement. He almost downright disowned Lucy, when he discovered her plans to move to Magnolia and attend Makarov’s school for a writing degree. For a while he left her alone, too angry to deal with it, after initially cutting her off, but now that she was actually graduating… He had come back with a vengeance, harassing her more than ever. Completely disgusted with the idea of her walking away with a degree from Mavis University and especially in writing.

This had been the main reason why Lucy had so desperately needed a break. Her packed schedule was not a new development. That was something she had been dealing with since her college career had started, what with being immediately forced to completely support herself from day one of leaving home. At this point she was more than equipped to handle her busy lifestyle, but what she couldn’t deal with, was her dad breathing down her neck and the disappearance of her two best friends.

Natsu… He came into her head again… Followed by the face of her other friend. The one she had been leaning on in his absence. The one who, at the moment, was also missing… Levy… Where are you guys…? Lucy could only wonder, her mind drifting back to them, as she gripped the phone in her hand tightly, all the while she began to watch Loke cook her breakfast.

Levy was drifting somewhere in-between the state of being awake and being asleep. The warm light of the sun was seeping through her closed eyelids, as it shinned through the large window that pervaded over her twin-sized bed. She tried to move in and effort to get comfortable, but found it to be very difficult, as if something large was keeping her locked in place. Her arms began to stretch out, as her eyelids fluttered open; the liquid of sleep was making her vision blurry, as she tried to adjust to the sun's bright rays.

She shifted her head up slowly, but was quickly deterred by the great amount of pain that struck her upon movement. She let out a slight moan, as her head plopped back down onto the pillow. She lay there wincing, with teeth clamped down as the pain resounded. Her hand instinctively reaching up towards her one temple, the source of it all. Her eyes stayed narrowed in confusion, as her fingers began to run over the strange bump that had disturbed and scabbed over her skin.

Her mind was still recovering from the deep sleep, as everything was slowly starting to sink back into memory. She attempted to shift her body once again, feeling the pain of her head among other aches throughout her whole form. Images were coming to her in patches, as she struggled to comprehend it all, her first coherent thought being, those were some crazy dreams I had…

And it was with those words that a bleak feeling washed over Levy. Her brain was quickly registering a second thought. The contact of something very warm and alive flushed up against her back; a part of it was draped across the skin of her stomach. Levy could feel her heart clenching, just as the muscles of her abdominals did upon realization. She inhaled a sharp breath; her eyes snapping all of the way open, as she felt paralyzed.

Nope… She thought. Her tiny trembling hand was pushing its way back under the covers as it very cautiously, landed over the large hot wrist that had embedded itself into her side. Her fingers gently wrapped around the limb. She could feel his rough skin, her palm sliding back over his forearm with a shudder. The heat was traveling to her cheeks and neck as a wave of sickness overtook her, upon feeling the slick cool bumps of his studs. Wasn’t a dream… She confirmed, her breath catching as she swallowed nervously. The full brunt of her night had completely returned to her, as she laid there
a prisoner of Gajeel’s arms in her own bed.

All of that… had actually happened! Her mind was twisting into uncertainty, as she could feel herself remembering it all. From being with Lucy to almost getting raped, to watching a man get his face pulverized, to stitching up Gajeel in her home, to then ending the night with sex. Quickly recapping all of the parts that she wished she could forget entirely and then all of the parts she wished never too.

Levy’s eyelids crashed back down tightly; her head was really starting to hurt. Gajeel’s large body was still pressed up against her back, his breathing was very quiet, but she could feel the steady beat of his chest growing with each exhale. He was practically on top of her, which was necessary, considering his size and the size of her bed, but it made it hard for her to do anything. She once again started to blush as she desperately tried to pull herself up and out from under him. Trying her best to ignore his hot bare skin and certain other parts of him, that she could feel touching her own naked body.

Finally, she was able to get her upper body up enough to twist, even if she was pushed up against the wall that her bed was aligned with. The turning motion made her ache, as she once again felt the exhaustion of everything she had been through, moving over each and every part of her being. Her eyes were closing again, as she braced for the soreness, pausing for a few seconds in hopes that it would quickly fade and it did once she was still. Her eyes opened, her line of sight automatically moving down towards the man who had been sleeping next to her.

Her mouth fell open slightly as she took him in; it was quite possibly the strangest thing Levy had ever laid eyes on. Seeing Gajeel’s relaxed face, basked in the sunlight that drifted through her window. His expression was so at peace, that it gave her the opportunity to really take in the structure of his cheekbones and the overall shape of his jaw. Her eyes easily gliding over the definitive line of his nose as she took in each feature of his face with wonder. She was gaining a small bit of satisfaction, as she looked over him freely, with no concern of being caught by his arrogance for once and so she found it difficult to look away for that reason too. He looked so different; nothing like the Gajeel she had met in that alleyway over three years ago, or maybe it was just, because she was seeing him in a new light.

Her heart was pounding as her fingers reached up towards her own chest; her face was beginning to flush. Back then, she had been too afraid to see him as she did now, her attraction for him was forthcoming. It was only natural, considering what had happened between them. Their night spent together, although rough at times, had been very revealing in more than just the literal sense. There had been a whole series of rolling emotions where Levy was concerned, as she finally allowed herself to cope with the fact that she did indeed desire Gajeel, despite her better judgment.

Perhaps she had always been attracted to him, but had been too bog down by her fears to face it? Although she hadn’t ever expected this to happen, certain events had provided the precise making, for the time to be right. Mutual trust had been earned for both parties and the security gained from that, had allowed for them to finally make the leap. Levy herself, having been the one to set it in motion, once she got a true glimpse into the disputed feelings Gajeel harbored inside.

Levy was breathing out serenely, as her mind replayed over some of the events that had taken place right before they had both fallen asleep. Her brain was struggling to wrap around it all, as it seemed unfathomable. She was on a high that she felt like she would never come down from, her stomach bounding from each memory. She took a moment to try and remember how to breathe properly, as she kept her eyes glued down to Gajeel’s face, before finally closing them. Her eyebrows were coming together, as she attempted to force all of those thoughts of their night together, out of her mind, but she found it incredibly difficult to focus on anything else, as the images kept invading.
Waves of pleasure were moving through her, as she relived bits and pieces of it, making her shudder on their remnants.

Stop… The logical part of her brain was interrupting, as she bit down on her bottom lip. *You've got to get past it…* Her inner voice was scolding her. *It's over now… It’s time to move on with your life…* Came the harsh words, reminding her. Speaking an evil truth that she could not deny, as she reluctantly came to terms with it. Owning up to the fact, that she would be better off locking up every part of that night away. Vaulted somewhere deep inside the recesses of her being, where it could never see the light of day. That way, she could once again embrace reality and move on fully.

She opened her eyes as they landed back over Gajeel’s peaceful expression. *Because you can bet, that he’s going too…* She thought as she remembered Gajeel’s womanizing ways. *Yes…* She thought, finally shifting her gaze off of him. A strange emptiness was filling the pit of her stomach as she thought about this, but she wasn’t going to let herself dwell on it. These feelings, not being an option in any circumstance that involved Gajeel and so she knew she’d do better by keeping them stifled.

Levy slowly began to shift her body forward, carefully towards where Gajeel was lying. She could feel her muscles aching once again with the movement, but she ignored them by biting down on her lip. Her eyes were widening as she tried to inch her way over top of Gajeel’s body without waking him, in an attempt to get on the other side of the bed, where the floor was. She was holding her breath, as her one hand landed on the mattress, digging in on the other side of Gajeel’s torso. *Please don’t wake up…* She thought as her eyes shifted back over to his face uneasily, while in her compromising position over him. She was still naked after all and the last thing she needed was to see Gajeel’s smug smirk, glancing up at her as she did this. As if she hadn’t already seen it enough, the night before. She couldn’t help, but shake her head and roll her eyes at it, as she blew a strand of blue hair out of her face, before summoning the courage to move again. Her other hand was shakily reaching near him, pressing into the mattress next to her other hand. Now all she just needed to do was get her legs over him. *Yea… I can do this…* She thought confidently, a slight smirk forming over her face, as she was now bridged above his large body. *Now… Just a little more…* She thought as she started to lift her one leg.

Her weight was balancing over him, as her one leg started coming up, issue was, that her hands were far too close to the edge of the mattress, as Gajeel took up entirely too much room on the bed. Her one palm was beginning to slip, making her falter and teeter over Gajeel. Her body nearly falling on top of him, but she managed to push herself more over to one side of the bed, so that she would instead roll roughly to the floor with a squeak.

Gajeel cracked open an eye, searching over the wall he was facing as he heard a small thud from something nearby. He could swear he also felt something brush past him as he began to blink away his weariness. His eyes were squinting against all of the sunlight that was invading his vision. He didn’t bother to move for the moment, his sleepiness prevailing over his need to budge.

“Ow…” Levy groaned as she sat up from the floor, rubbing the back of her head with one eye closed. She immediately tensed, her eyes darting back up to the unmoving body of Gajeel as he still just laid there, his back facing her. She let out a breath of relief, as he appeared to still be sleeping. She began to get to her feet carefully, a slight chill running over her. She was no longer surrounded
by the warmth of her bed, but was still wearing nothing nonetheless, so she crossed her arms over herself. Goosebumps were forming over her arms and legs as she stepped around the messy floor of her apartment. Her eyes were downcast as she searched for proper footing, making her way towards the dresser for some clothing.

Gajeel could hear the sound of her feet and then the rattling of a dresser drawer. He was still lying there, his eyes blinking consecutively in an effort to stay awake. Finally accepting that the only way he would be able to do that, is by sitting up. He heaved out a small breath as he carefully began to shift his body up, his torso rising and his hands supporting him as he hunched forwards. He was now sitting up on Levy’s bed, his lower half still covered by the blanket, as his head swiveled around. He paused upon seeing Levy with her back to him.

She had just been pulling a tank top down over her head when Gajeel spotted her, it quickly concealing the sight of her tattoo and naked back as she pulled the tight fabric down the length of her torso. It did nothing to conceal the sight of her round, yet full naked butt from him though, as he couldn’t help, but stare at her with his mouth falling open. The hem of her tank top was just reaching her waist, right at the point where her backend was protruding out from her hips. Gajeel could feel his chest tightening and his mouth drying, as a great amount of heat spread over his face and neck. There were no words or smug comments, for once in his life he actually managed to stay quiet, as he continued to move his eyes over the perfect shape of it.

Levy had just been fiddling with the hem of the piece of clothing she had just slipped on, when she noticed something out of the corner of her eye. She froze as a sinking feeling came over her. She slowly turned her trembling head, only to meet the red irises and snake-like pupils of Gajeel, as he stared at her with his dumbfounded expression. Gajeel’s mouth slammed shut as he swallowed hard, she had caught him and they both knew it, upon matching eyes with each other.

“Gajeel!” Came the shriek and with it, so did the books as Gajeel suddenly felt a large one, hit him in the face. Gajeel’s head went back, as the cover of a book crashed into his forehead, before sliding down and falling into his lap. His hands went slamming down over himself, as he could feel another part of his lower half throbbing from just the sight of her and he wanted to be sure it was protected. Levy was moving her body down as she turned towards him, her fingers desperately trying to stretch the fabric of her tank top down, as a means to cover her body. “Don’t look at me! You jerk!” She screamed at Gajeel, who was now rubbing his head right where the book had hit him.

“What the hell Levy?! I already saw all of it!” He had started to say, as he looked back towards her, only to have another book thrown at him. It was almost as if Levy had been lying in wait, with the book just hovering in her hand, over her head. This one hit him dead on, before falling to the floor, making him immediately turn away from her, out of a need to survive her wrath. “OW! OKAY FINE!” Gajeel raged.

Levy was watching him with another book in hand, as she had just been grabbing them from the floor. It was up and ready just in case, her teeth were clamped down out of anger, her one eyebrow up. She paused taking in the sight of his back just to be sure he was being honest, before lowering her guard. She let the book she was holding drop back to floor, as she carefully stood up with eyes still on him. Then she sneakily made her way back towards her dresser, with a steady glare over him, as if she didn’t trust him. Gajeel had his eyes facing the wall; his teeth biting down in frustration, at first from seeing her and at second, from being attacked by her.

“What did ya have to go and do that for?” He questioned her as he could hear the rattle of her dresser
opening once again. “It fuckin hurt…” He mumbled, rubbing his head again, still not daring to move otherwise. Levy’s eyes were looking to Gajeel’s naked back. Her cheeks were still red, as she pushed her other leg into a pair of pajama pants, not bothering to put on underwear as she pulled them up to her waist. She looked away from him as she stood back up straight, letting out a small breath with eyes closed.

“Sorry…” She sighed, her eyes opening as she glanced back towards him. “You’re safe now…” She told him gently; watching as he cautiously turned his head. His one eye catching her from over his shoulder, before he slowly began to turn his body around completely. Unfortunately, the covers were falling away as he made his twisting motion, his legs having swung their way over the edge of the bed. This time revealing the whole spectacle of what was in-between his legs to Levy, as her eyes grew tenfold.

“GAJEEL!” She snapped again, her hands slapping over her eyelids, as her face turned bright red. “CLOSE YOUR LEGS!” She shrieked, mortified by the sight of him. Gajeel’s stare slowly slid back down, over his own body as if just remembering.

“Oh… Sorry.” He spoke before looking back up at her. She had her large eyes completely hidden by her hands. He couldn’t help, but smirk at her as she acted so shy, the sight of it making him laugh. “Ya sure ya don’t wanna get another look? Might be your last chance.” He questioned her arrogantly, his one studded brow rising. He kept his eyes on her as he saw her peek through her fingers, before she turned away from him altogether, as if completely exasperated.

“Will you please just cover yourself!??” She stammered and with that, Gajeel just gently pulled the sheet of the bed back over his lower half. Concealing himself from the waist down, his legs still edged over the side of the bed.

“Okay… Alls good shrimp.” He told her, as her arms and hands whipped back down at her sides. She turned to face him, her eyes were wide and her face was still red, as he just eyed her calmly from his spot on the bed. He was still smirking. “What’s got you bein’ all shy today? Don’t ya remember last night…?” He questioned.

“Well… Yes… But…” Levy looked away from him, her lips tightening into an awkward expression, as if she didn’t know what to say.

Her cheeks were burning, as she could feel her stomach flipping and her body quaking from just the mere mention of their night together. Of course, she remembered last night! Hell, she could swear she still felt the absence of him, from when he had been inside of her, but even so… It wasn’t as if the two of them were actually lovers or anything, so she didn’t see the point in remaining comfortable with him. They weren’t to be familiar with each other, if it wasn’t ever going to happen again.

“It was just a one-time thing.” She stated with a shake of her head, as if reconfirming it for herself, out loud. Her eyes were landing back on him with a perplexed look, her cheeks still holding onto their same color.

“Ain’t that spose’ ta be my line?” Gajeel asked, looking over her as he rubbed the back of his head. “After all… I’m the one who’s been with countless women, right? Wasn’t that what you said?” He questioned her sarcastically. He had a hand resting over his chin, just to make it look as if he were pondering the memory with confusion. Levy’s eyes landed back on him, her face full of distaste.

“Yea so?!” She countered angrily. “Are you trying to tell me that, that isn’t the truth then?” She snapped back, as she too mimicked Gajeel’s pondering gesture now. “Cause… Hmm… Let me see.” Her eyes narrowed on him. “I think I can recall someone telling me, that I was right about that
assumption.” Gajeel began to laugh at her, making Levy’s arms fall back down to her sides out of annoyance, she then glared at him. “Why the heck are you laughing Gajeel? This isn’t funny to me!” She replied, clearly frustrated with him. Gajeel’s laughter eased, as he looked back up at her with his infamous grin.

“Nah… I know.” He stated. “Lighten up shrimp.” He added, his tone easy as he gave her a once over with his eyes. “You are right…” He spoke, his voice softening with a shrug. “Last night… As amazing as it was, was a one-time thing.” His grin was weakening, as his eyes stayed over Levy’s face. The anger was fading from her features as he continued. “Not just, because of routine, but also to keep you safe.” His stare on her hardened, as his expression become far more serious. “Because we both know that my life ain’t any place fer someone like you and I’ve already pulled you in far deeper than I ever meant too.” Levy watched, as Gajeel’s face darkened into a grave look, his grin completely gone now. She couldn’t help, but feel a strange sense of sadness fill her, as he continued. “I’ll keep my word though. Nothin’ that happened last night, will come back to you…” He paused, his hand reaching up, so that his fingers could touch his own temple. “And then… I’ll devote that night to memory, just as I said I would.” He uttered the last few words dishearteningly, as he finally glanced down and away from her. His hand was dropping with his eyes. And then, just like that, the unspoken agreement they had made between them, had finally been spoken.

Levy stood there, a hostage of Gajeel’s words, her own unreachable. His head was hanging down, almost as if he were contemplating the things he had just said and it made him appear somewhat regrettable. A fore warning of something great, pitted from deep within Levy, its claws dragging down her back painfully. Her knees were weakening, as her feet stayed planted, her complexion paling. She could feel the mounting pressure over her heart, oppressing her, making her want to cry as she took him in with a sorrowful expression.

But why…? She didn’t know. Had he really meant what he had just said? Her brain was scrambling to reason it out… Did it really matter regardless? Her foot was stomping down on all of the emotions, snuffing them out, as she knew that it damn well shouldn’t.

Levy bit down, her glossy eyes closing with a trembling sigh. She couldn’t shake the strange feeling of grief that was overpowering her and so instead she decided to change the subject. Her eyelids lifted, her face etched with empathy, as she once again looked him over.

“How is your leg…?” She finally questioned him softly. Her voice was gentle and hardly audible, as she swallowed painfully. Gajeel brought his eyes back up to meet hers, holding her stare for a second, before a tiny smirk graced his lips to ease the mood.

“It’s okay…” He replied in an equally soft voice, his tone sounding a bit more cheerful compared to hers. His eyes shifted back down to his leg, as his smile grew a little more. His hand rested over top of it and the sheet covering him, before he looked back up at her with a comforting grin. “Still hurts a bit, but it ain’t so bad now… Everythin’ still intact and such.” He finished.

“I still want to take a look at it…” She told him. “After… Well. Everything…” She added hesitantly, her eyes averting upwards with slight embarrassment. “In due time though.” She reconfirmed quickly. Changing the subject, before he could make any smart-ass remark about the topic. Levy then looked away from him, her body turning to head towards the little kitchen. “But for now…” She stepped over to the counter, her tiny frame reaching up as Gajeel watched her. She opened one of the cabinets and pulled something out, coffee filters. “Do you want some coffee?” She asked as she turned back towards him, her eyes looking insecure. Gajeel stared at her for a moment, his eyes widening.

“Yea…” He answered. Running a hand through his large mane, as he looked away from her
awkwardly. “That’d be great actually…” Levy couldn’t escape the tiny smile that was creeping over her lips.

“Um…” She began. “This might be a bit easier if you weren’t still naked…” She added, finally looking away from him. Her cheeks staining red once more, as she set to work making the coffee. Gajeel looked back up at her, his infamous smirk now coming to light. He leaned back some in the bed, his eyes going over her whole body as she had her back turned towards him.

“Anyone ever tell ya, yer really bossy?” He asked. Earning him, a glare from over her shoulder. “Gajeel take off yer pants.” He mocked with a shrug, his eyes wandering around the room as he continued. “Now take this off Gajeel… Oh wait no… Now puttit back on.” He teased. His eyes were landing back on her with a defiant gaze and a small playful smirk over his lips. Levy let out an annoyed breath, as she turned around to face him. Her hands were leaning back against the counter behind her, as she raised a brow at him skeptically.

“Maybe you need to be bossed around some.” She stated. The firmness in her voice only serving to make Gajeel’s smirk grow into a full fang-revealing grin.

There it is… Came Gajeel’s inner monologue, so full of satisfaction as he looked her over in that same daring pose. Her stance was strong, and her stare was bold and unmoving. This was one of the reasons why he enjoyed Levy so much. She didn’t ever put up with any of his bullshit and he found it so damn entertaining. He lived for the back and forth with her; it was half of the reason why he could never bring himself to leave her alone.

He could feel his excitement growing in multiple ways, as images of the night before were scrolling through his brain. No longer, were they just fantasies that he had dreamed up about her. The challenge that was her personality, only serving to make him desire her all over again, as if he couldn’t help, but feel like their little game was real and it was finally his turn to make a move. He looked her over one last time with his laughing red eyes, an evil idea forming in his head, before he suddenly stood up.

Levy’s eyes widened as Gajeel straightened up to his full height. His eyes were still on her as he stood there, stark naked with nothing, but the sheet he was holding to just barely cover, what was in-between his legs. He was watching her as Levy winced and turned her head away, flustered by the sight of him.

“Gajeel…!” She gaped, clearly uncomfortable.

It was hard not to be, as he stood there taunting her with his evenly proportioned, yet solidly built and well-toned, body. She stole a glance at him cautiously, her eyes moving from his feet, up the length of his long legs, scaling over his tan skin. She could see the thickness of his thighs, as the blanket only just covered the one part of him, with the way he was holding it. Her mouth was drying, as she followed the diverging line of his clean-cut hips and further up his familiar torso. Then to his robust shoulders and wide biceps. The right one dawning the spiraling black, Phantom tattoo over it. She finally glanced away with a slight exasperated pant, once she could no longer stand to stare at him any longer. Gajeel meanwhile, only tilted his head at Levy’s flustered reactions towards him. Her being the continued object of his focus for the moment.

“Something bothern’ you shrimp?” He questioned, stepping towards her as his brow lowered. Levy’s eyes widened as she heard him move a little closer. Her head snapping back up in his direction, clearly alarmed.

“Wha-what are you doing?” She questioned him, her anxiety was building. Her fingers were bracing onto the countertop behind her. Her body nervously pushing itself back against it, as her face
radiated with heat.

Gajeel’s stare on Levy was hardening and his smirk disappearing, he made his way towards her. He could see how on edge he was making her, as he approached. Hell, she was now basically sitting on top of the damn counter just in an effort to stay away from him, but without truly going anywhere. Just like always. She never seemed to fully commit to running away from him.

The game Gajeel had been playing with her, was now lost somewhere in his head, as his eyes were far too busy drinking her in to remember it. Memories of her from the night before were flashing through his mind, prompting him closer still. He could feel that same, deep seeded desire, attacking his insides with a vengeance. Making him far hungrier for her now, than he had ever felt before. He hadn’t thought it was possible. The singular taste he had, had of her, was supposed to have cured him of that curse forever, but instead it seemed to have left him with something akin to the complete opposite effect.

He watched her large timid eyes meet his, with fearful bewilderment. His beastly frame was now towering over Levy’s, like a threat. The monster in him needing to be put back on its leash, as he could feel himself throbbing all the harder at just the mere idea of getting to be with her again. Her innocent, yet lost expression being the only thing left, to keep him grounded.

It took everything in Gajeel’s will, to not reach out and grab Levy right then and there. His arms were flexing at his sides as he quaked with the power of it. She was staring up at him with her mouth agape, her golden eyes were wide with confusion. She was panting, her chest rising and falling with her breaths, as her one hand had curled fingers hovering just over her heart. Her body was still leaning back against the counter out of the alarm of his overbearing presence, hanging over her.

Gajeel could feel his own chest heave, as he forced himself to breathe. His tight muscles easing, as he tried to get a grip over everything. His mind felt lost in a fog of insanity for those few brief seconds, as he approached her like that. His thoughts were returning slowly, as instinct and sin took a backseat. The lustful and greedy intent fading, as he regained control of himself. What the hell are ya doin’? His mind was questioning as his tight fist began to ease, his fingers cramped as they opened slowly.

This can’t happen again… you know this. His thoughts spoke, as he took in her beautiful yet concerned face, her wild azure hair carelessly tumbling around it. He closed his eyes, as he breathed out through his nose, easing the tension further. He felt guilty now, not only for what he had just done, but also for making her look at him like that. He didn’t feel he deserved her worry; nor could he even comprehend why she possessed it for him. Levy’s eyes stayed on him, her brow coming together, as she tilted her head.

“G-Gajeel?” She uttered out nervously. He was silent, as he stood only about two feet away from her and then finally, his eyes opened and landed back on her. His hard brow was softening and a small smirk was appearing back over his lips, per usual. Levy’s body was easing some off of the counter, as she looked deeply perplexed by his actions and then without warning he turned. Levy stood there dumb founded as he began to step away from her, his body bending down quickly to pick up a few articles of clothing from the floor.

“Don’t worry shrimp… I’m goin… Clothes will be on, like requested.” He stated with a hand over his shoulder. He walked over to her bathroom, matching eyes with her briefly, as the small smirk still played over his lips. Levy could only stare with mouth open, still completely flabbergasted by his behavior, before he disappeared behind the door.
W-What the hell was that?! She questioned upon hearing the bathroom door slam shut. Her body whipped around, so that her hands could grip at the counter tightly. Her eyes staring down out of disbelief, as her heart pounded. The tension was high.

“What… the fuck…?” Gajeel murmured out through haggard breaths as he stood there, before the sink in Levy’s tiny bathroom. His red eyes were staring back hard, into his own unmerciful expression through the mirror. He had a death grip on the sides of the counter, as he leaned in close to his own reflection, his teeth gritting. “What the fuck!?” He snapped again, his fist was coming down on the counter out of frustration with a pound. His head slumped forwards; his eyes were searching over the drain, confusion over his own actions, rattling him to the bone.

What the hell had gotten into him in there? It wasn’t the first time he had struggled with his restraint around Levy, but the pull he had felt towards her, had been significantly stronger this time and he couldn’t figure out why. Normally he didn’t give two shits about a girl after spending the night with her. Why should he? He had gotten what he had wanted after all, but this… This wasn’t going away. Not only was it not going away, but his urges for Levy felt stronger than ever.

“Fuck…”

He raised his head up, leaning back as a hand ran over his forehead and through his slick hair. He stood up straight now, his eyes on the ceiling as he tried to calm down. His large hand was going to his neck and scratching it, as he puzzled over the situation. What the hell could he do about it? Nothing… His mind answered as his eyes snapped back up to his reflection. Ya just gotta walk away, as planned. He thought stubbornly as he clenched his jaw.

He needed to get out of there and away from her as soon as possible. And so, with that thought, he bent down and grabbed the discarded clothes he had brought in the bathroom from the floor. First, he slipped on his boxer shorts quickly, and then he bent down to pick up his pants next, grabbing his wallet from the one back pocket and a dead phone from the other.

Shit… His head cursed as he set the phone down on the counter. Hope nothin’ important came up… He thought, before bringing up the pair of pants in hand, so he could put them on. Suddenly there was a small thudding noise, as something fell out of one of the front pockets of his pants and hit the ground. Gajeel’s eyes darted over to the small object with realization. He had almost completely forgotten about it.

Levy had just been watching the last bit of coffee drip into the now half full pot, as her mind continued to puzzle over the way Gajeel had acted. She could smell the freshness of it, warming the air as her eyes followed the small twirl of steam, rising off of it. The way he had approached her with that starved look on his face, she could feel her chest constricting at the thought, Lucy’s voice was echoing through her mind.

“I think he’s trying to eat you.”

Levy shook her head at the memory from the club. Her face was practically glowing, as she realized the irony of those words. She could feel her breathing stop with a slight gasp as a particular memory of Gajeel came back to her. It was one of him, standing before her, at the edge of the bed. Catching her eye, as he tossed her underwear aside and then began to lower his body with the smallest hints of a smirk over his lips.
A shudder moved over Levy, as she felt like a complete idiot for thinking about it, all over again. Her hand was grabbing the handle of the coffee pot, as she took it out of the machine, to pour some of the hot liquid into an awaiting porcelain mug. She watched as the black liquid spilled into the container, the warmth emanating from it.

The worst thing about all of this was that, she couldn’t even tell Lucy any of what had happened. Nothing about how she had almost been raped, nothing about how Gajeel had saved her, or how he had beaten Thibault up, and nothing about her stitching him up, all of it was just... off limits. It was far too risky to get anyone else involved, plus she didn’t want to worry her best friend anyways. Lucy had enough going on already, without needing to get involved in Levy’s night of hell. So instead, Levy figured she would just think up some excuse to tell her best friend, when the time came.

She stared at the coffee before her on the counter, her eyebrows lowering. Still though, Levy couldn’t help, but feel a bit disappointed by the secret. Mostly, because it meant that, she would have to keep the sex a secret too. Not that she had really planned on divulging details about it or anything, but she was still wishing she could at least share that it had happened, with at least one of her friends. Lucy had known how badly Levy wanted to hook up with someone and now there was just no safe way to tell the blond that she had actually managed to go through with it. It was a bit of a letdown, what with everything her and Lucy had talked about coming to mind.

Levy sighed as she thought about all of this regretfully. Her mind was drifting back to her blond best friend and how she was doing. She was suddenly remembering the guy they had met, Loke, and she was now wondering if anything had happened between the two of them. She couldn’t even call Lucy to find out, as she still didn’t have her phone.

Just as that thought entered Levy’s mind the door to the bathroom opened revealing a now fully clothed Gajeel with the exception of his boots and socks. Levy shot him an unsuspecting look, as they locked eyes. There was a moment of silence as they both stood there frozen, before Levy’s eyes scaled over him.

“Oh… I still wanted to look at your leg.” She spoke, noticing his pants. Gajeel shrugged his shoulders at her, before finally walking back into the room.

“Eh… Don’t worry bout it.” He spoke, as Levy glanced down at the coffee mug. Her eyebrows pushing together in worry. *How can I not worry about it?* She questioned him internally, but she decided not to press the subject as Gajeel stepped closer.

“How do you like your coffee?” She asked him as she could feel him approaching; he was standing next to her now. She paused again, unsure of what was happening, afraid to look his way, as she could feel his eyes on her. She didn’t know if he was doing what he had done earlier.

“Black.” He stated calmly as she grabbed the mug and turned towards him avoiding his face. “Levy.” He spoke her name, finally earning her doe like eyes.

“Y-yes..?” She questioned with a tilt of her head as she caught his serious stare and held the mug in her small hand.

“I want you to take this.” He stated, his hand gesturing towards her. Levy’s eyes glanced down at the object he was holding with an outstretched brow. Her mind freezing up, out of shock, as she looked over it fearfully, it was a knife. Not just any knife, Thibault’s knife. The one that had been lodged into Gajeel’s leg, the one that had nearly killed him. Her mouth fell open as her eyes snapped back up to Gajeel’s face with disbelief.
“I can’t take that.” She uttered, her shoulders were tensing as she couldn’t believe he was asking this of her. “Why would I even want to?!” She exclaimed, her face was turning white as she began to shake her head at him. Gajeel kept his steely stare on her, as he could easily read the fear in her.

“For protection.” He answered her firmly. His voice pulling her eyes back up to his stern face. “You take it and you learn how to use it properly… So that way, should ya ever get in ta trouble like ya did last night… You won’t be defenseless.” He offered, his tone unwavering as if he truly believed in what he was saying.

“But… That’s Thibault’s knife!” Levy exclaimed pointing at it with her free hand. “The one that stabbed you… I… I can’t Gajeel. I—”

“Levy…” He interjected. “What did I tell you before?” He shook his head slowly, his eyes never leaving hers. “This is nothin’, but a piece of metal. It just happens to be pointy…” He stated. “It has no power over you, or me.” He confirmed seriously. “Yer fear of it is self-manifested, because you know what it can do.” He shrugged. “Hell… You’ve seen it first hand, but it couldn’t have done any of that, without a man behind it… So, he’s the one you oughta be fearin’.” He finished.

Levy stood there stiffly, her eyes darting back and forth from the knife to his face; she was caught in a state of suspense. She understood what he was saying, but she couldn’t stop the distrust she felt every time she laid eyes on the object. Not when she knew of its intent and previous deeds.

“Gajeel…” She replied softly, her eyes pleading.

“It’s just a tool Levy… Just…” He shook his head. “Would ya at least consider it?” He questioned, as if frustrated. “For my peace of mind!” He added, glancing back at her with a desperate look in his eye. He really was being serious about this. He didn’t want to believe that anything like that could ever happen to her again, but he knew better. The world was a dangerous place, he knew that first hand and learning to fight with something was one of the first steps to surviving it.

Levy held his stare, her hand finally reaching for the object hesitantly, much to Gajeel’s relief. Finally, she set her small white hand over his much larger and darker skinned one, concealing the knife beneath it.

“Gajeel… Are you sure this is okay? I mean what about evidence and such?” She questioned, her worried eyes looking up at him, before taking her hand back with the knife now in it.

“Don’t worry about that… Nobody is gonna find that thing if you have it… And even if they do, there’s no way for them to link it to Thibault. I was the one who was stabbed with it… So his blood wasn’t on it, mine was… Besides I cleaned it…” Gajeel answered, as he took the coffee Levy offered him and walked towards her bed.

“Okay…” She answered softly as Gajeel sat back down on the edge of Levy’s bed with a groan. He began to sip his coffee as Levy watched him with sympathetic eyes.

“Gajeel…?” She questioned.

“What is it shrimp?” He asked between sips, the mood between them had eased considerably.

“I need to get ready for work…” She began looking off, her eyes landing on the clock. “Well, I at least need to shower…” She started.

“Sounds like a good time to me… I’ll join ya.” He replied with a smirk, making Levy huff. He got a small bit of joy out of watching her become frazzled.
“No, you won’t!” She snapped. “Stitches remember?”

“Oh… right.” Gajeel answered as he scratched his head.

“But speaking of that, will you please let me check them when I get done?” She asked. “We really do need to keep an eye on them. I can’t have them reopening, that will put you at great risk for infection and—”

“Alright!” Gajeel barked. “I get it!” He huffed. “It’s fine, whatever, just go do your thing!” He threw an arm at her, Levy couldn’t help, but smile amused by his annoyance as she set the knife he had handed her down, on the dresser.

“Good patient.” She replied cheerfully as Gajeel set his mug down on the table and folded his arms over his chest.

“Yea… yea… Whatever.” He grumbled, as Levy started to head towards the bathroom with a victorious smile over her face.

“Come to think of it… I’m gonna have to leave a little earlier than normal.” Levy said a finger going over her chin, as she spoke her thoughts out loud. “Since I can’t call Jet to come pick me up… What with me not having my phone and stuff.” Gajeel looked back up at her, confusion coming over him as his arms unfolded

“Yer phone? Why? What the hell happened to it?” He asked, catching Levy right before she was about to step into the bathroom. She paused, looking up at him.

“Oh… Well… I told you remember?” She asked, making Gajeel shake his head at her.

“I left it in the club bathroom Gajeel… I told you that, when we got out into the parking lot remember…?” Her hands went to her hips as her eyes drifted upwards, continuing before he could answer. “Well… I guess you were a little preoccupied to be fair…” She spoke, glancing back down at him. “But, yea… I dropped it when Thibault went after me and I didn’t have any time to grab it, after we rushed out of there.” She explained, waving it off like it was no big deal. “Guess I’ll just have to stop by there sometime and see if anyone found it…” She added absentmindedly, before disappearing behind the bathroom door.

Gajeel sat there on the bed, his face paling as he listened to the door slam shut, followed by the noise of the faucet turning and the water running. He felt numb with realization as it invaded him like a cold wind, making it hard to breathe. His eyes were large ovules as he stared at the messy floor of Levy’s apartment, just trying to wrap his head around the true impact of Levy’s words.

I left it in the club bathroom Gajeel...

No… Came his own inner voice in response, as his mind was beginning to panic. The club doesn’t have yer phone now Levy… Gajeel could feel his heart icing over as he inhaled a sharp breath, a cold sweat had formed over him, as he suddenly felt trapped.

The fuckin cops do…

More Monster FYI’s:

-Characters you can expect to see that you haven’t: Juvia, Natsu, Pantherlily, Mirajane, The Element Four, Jose, Makarov, Wendy, Jellal, Porlyusica.
-Which characters will be important? Gajeel and Levy obviously. Natsu, Juvia and Lucy will all play major roles in the plot.

-So, I’ve been hinting about Gajeel and Levy’s magic some more in these recent chapters. In chapter 7 I had Gajeel say, “The only ‘words’ I’ll be eating is yours.” This was a nod to the Tenrou Island part of the anime/manga when he eats the IRON Levy gives him! There were a few other references too, like Levy thinking Gajeel is made of something stronger, AKA something like iron in reference to his tolerance for pain.

-When writing Elfman, I went out of my way to say the word ‘man’ as much as possible for his dialog in chapter 7.

-When writing Chapter 7, I made Gajeel forceful during parts of the love scene with Levy, just because he is indeed the Monster and I was trying to portray that. But even so… He still cares about Levy and he wouldn’t truly hurt her and what is even more important about those scenes, is that Levy knows that. Despite the roughness of desire at times, she did feel safe, safe enough to go through with it all and this was, because Gajeel’s constant efforts to not only MAKE SURE she felt okay, but also, because he made her feel more ‘confident’ at times too. Especially at times when she needed him, due to insecurities. There were a lot of things I tried to convey during that love scene and that was part of the reason why it went on so long. It was very important development for both characters in multiple aspects!

-Gajeel is a self-loathing character in Monster; despite his arrogance he really doesn’t like himself. He thinks he is a bad person and that is why he puts Levy on a pedestal, because to him she is the ultimate good in the world. To the point where he sees her as saintly and he knows he will never match up to her. She is his tiny, little shred of heaven, and he is always on the outside looking in at her, but this is also why he sees her as a bit naïve. She’s been ‘inside’ safe and protected maybe… From his perspective (although he doesn’t know her past yet) And he seems to think that she isn’t aware of the true ugliness in the world, because of her caring and forgiving nature. And so, he often worries she will get herself into trouble by being too trusting. After all she does socialize with him and so he must think that. This is also why I have him imply often that he is ‘looking out’ for her at times. Like her living on the ground floor and the knife situation in this chapter… And ya know what… He might not be wrong about all of that, but there is a lot left to be revealed about Levy’s character in this story and why she is the way she is.

- Gajeel’s honesty with Levy will continue to play a role in this story and will end up being pretty significant. The day he lies to her is the day we should all be very worried, because something is going to need to be very seriously wrong.

That’s all I can think up for now; hope you enjoyed these if you read them!

Chapter End Notes

Didn’t know what this would be
But I knew I didn’t see
What you thought you saw in me
I jumped the gun
So sure you’d split and run
Ready for the worst
Before the damage was done

Oh ho oh ho oh ho oh

The storm never came
Or it never was
Didn’t know getting lost in the blue
It meant I wound up losing you

Welcome to the inner workings of my mind
So dark and foul I can’t disguise
Can’t disguise
Nights like this
I become afraid
Of the darkness in my heart
Hurricane

Oh ho oh ho

What’s wrong with me
Why not understand and see
I never saw
What you saw in me
Keep my eyes open
My lips sealed
My heart closed
And my ears peeled

Welcome to the inner workings of my mind
So dark and foul I can’t disguise
Can’t disguise
Nights like this
I become afraid
Of the darkness in my heart
Hurricane

Make ash and leave the dust behind
Lady Diamond in the sky
Wild light
Glowing bright
To guide me when I fall
I fall on tragedy

Welcome to the inner workings of my mind
So dark and foul I can’t disguise
Can’t disguise
Nights like this
I become afraid
Of the darkness in my heart
Hurricane
“Hurricane” By MSMR
Roar

Chapter Summary

Gajeel panics and frantically scrambles to protect Levy. Levy starts to realize how good she feels, only to then realize she has been ditched. Gajeel threatens a co-worker for his help and is then busted by the cops and arrested. Levy attempts to work, but it doesn’t fly. Juvia shows up to help Gajeel, but is stifled when she meets a certain handsome cop. Gajeel ends up asking Juvia for a different favor. Jet tries to get to the bottom of Levy’s behavior in the car, but she keeps it quiet. Chapter ends with two people meeting and realizing they have one very important connection.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 9: Roar

Gajeel was hobbling down the street away from Levy’s apartment building as fast as his wounded leg would allow him too. The sun was nearing its highest point in the cerulean sky; blotchy white clouds were occasionally passing over the large body, blocking out its warm glow. Gajeel could feel the cool air filtering in and out of his lungs as he gritted his teeth, withholding a pant. The pain of carrying his own large weight was straining the still fresh stitches, as he could feel the contraction of his skin and muscles with each vigorous step he made.

He could hear Levy’s voice in the back of his mind, scolding him for not taking care while injured, but he didn’t have the time to be worried about it, when this was all in an effort to protect her. If he didn’t act fast, then he wouldn’t be able to keep the promise he had made to her. The one about keeping her out of every bit of trouble they had landed themselves in the night before.

I know I fuckin’ saw one on this street... But where!? Fuck! His mind was cursing while still in a state of perpetual panic. His red eyes were darting back and forth along the sidewalks searching, as he retraced the steps him and Levy had taken the night prior. The cold air of fall was stinging at his skin, as he had no jacket on. He had left his coat hanging over his bike and his bike was still at the club. All he had over his torso was the same short-sleeved shirt he had been wearing that night. The tight fabric of the sleeve just managing to cover the black spiraling symbol tattooed over his right bicep. His head was shifting back and forth, as he passed by several more buildings with a heavy groan. His eyes slammed shut for a moment as he bit back the pain of moving, he was desperate and completely frustrated.

Upon hearing Levy’s revelation about her phone, Gajeel had quickly been able to deduce what had happened to it. It wasn’t difficult for him as he was accustomed to these types of scenarios and was normally two steps ahead, as he often needed to be. His line of work didn’t allow for such mistakes otherwise, but he hadn’t counted on Levy’s involvement making things so complicated. It wasn’t her
fault of course. If anything, Gajeel was still blaming himself, as he truly believed Thibault would not have even targeted Levy, if it hadn’t been for his noticeable interest in her.

Gajeel’s eyes were opening as the guilt and regret lingered inside of him, resonating like a sickness in the pit of his stomach. He hated what he had done to her. How he dragged her through hell and back, just because he hadn’t been able to stay away from her. And he especially hated how he was once again, rushing in to save her from his own misgivings, for a second time in less than twenty-four hours. How the hell had he let any of this happen?

He could feel his heart clenching as he inhaled a deep breath, his body pushing onwards desperately. After Levy had disappeared into the bathroom to shower, it had only taken Gajeel about two minutes to let everything sink in, before he was jumping into action. He had thrown on his boots and disappeared out the door without even looking back. His body was a bundle anxiety, as his brain racked itself with any plausible solution that may have been within his reach. He had no means of contacting anyone, what with his burner cell being dead. He also had no transportation and he needed to get that damn phone back immediately. He knew the police had it in their possession by now.

Gajeel’s mind stayed focused in on the facts, in order to give himself clarity, so he could think properly. Levy had first heard the sirens during his brutal assault on Thibault, so he knew that couldn’t be the reason why they had initially shown up at the club. The blood in the bathroom was the more likely reason, as it had been far too messy for people to ignore, what with Thibault’s blood coating the wall and Levy’s pooling on the floor. The police would have had to come, to investigate the scene and then they would have taken blood samples for DNA testing purposes, once there. That would also have been when they would have found Levy’s discarded phone and confiscated it as potential evidence for whatever the hell had happened in the bathroom. Then lastly, they would have ended the night by discovering and scraping up, what was left of Thibault off of the parking lot concrete.

Gajeel knew the routine well, he had too, in order to cover his own hide, but he hadn’t ever counted on covering someone else’s. The whole lot of it was just a giant mess. The only bright side being that at least Levy’s blood wouldn’t be recognized, as he was pretty sure she hadn’t ever been arrested before. They would not have her DNA on file to match it with anything. That mattered little though, considering they would be able to link Thibault to the bathroom through his blood, right where they had found her phone.

That phone was the one damming piece of evidence that linked Levy to everything. Once the police got inside of it, they would know exactly where to go for questioning about the battery charges on Thibualt. And once the police knew about Levy’s involvement… It would only be a matter of time before others would find out as well, much more dangerous people. These people being the real reason why Gajeel was beginning to sweat. Forcing himself onwards with all of his power despite the god-awful pain that was antagonizing him with each step.

A chill moved through him as he thought about what would happen, it made it difficult for him to swallow the cold air. He couldn’t let it get to that point. Nobody could know why he had really taken out Thibault, because if they did, she would be the one to pay. She would become leverage against him.

*Why didn’t you tell me sooner Levy?!* Gajeel shook his head furiously at the thought; knowing deep down that none of this was her fault, but his mind was grasping at straws. *If I had known... I woulda went back in there and grabbed it, damn it! I wouldn’t have gone home with you...*

His mind was flashing with the memories of their night together, shining like a globe of warmth,
among the dark bitter cold world that was his own. He could feel that darkness hanging over him, threatening to conceal that golden glow. Snuff it out, like wind blowing out a single match. A very critical question was taking shape in his mind. Had it been worth it? Had it been worth risking her safety, her life, everything that she was, just so he could fulfill his sadistic craving of her?

His stomach was turning with the sickness once again, as he felt like he might need to stop jogging, just so he could throw up. The shame was burning his insides into silky black ash, as he already knew the answer to that question. His history with her was speaking all of the truths, that he wished he could deny.

Gajeel was a selfish and possessive man, and if given the opportunity he knew he would take Levy up again, in a matter of seconds. His will, to resist his inner most desires was weak, as he normally relied on instinct in most aspects of his life anyways. And his pull to Levy was far too strong, as she had tainted him with her angelic vitality long ago. His being with her, had only made it that much worse, to the point where Gajeel couldn’t even lie to himself about it anymore. The ugliness of his own self-serving nature, made him hate himself all the more and he knew that was just one, on a list of many reasons why he would never deserve her.

Gajeel had stopped to catch his breath, as he was on the verge of retching, partially due to the pain and partially due to his train of thought. He bent over his knees some, his wide eyes staring at the cement of the sidewalk, as a cold drop of sweat dripped off of his forehead, hitting the stone below him. His throat was dry; his body cold and yet the sweat continued to drip, as he was on the verge of hyperventilating. He brought his clamy head back up, a hand settling over his abdominals to ease the wrenching pain in his gut. That was when he spotted it, what he had been looking for. It was a phone booth across the street.

There…! His thoughts exclaimed as he B-lined his way over to it with stomping feet. He finally reached it, grabbing at the sides as he scrambled his way in. His large quivering hand reaching for the wallet in his back pocket. He opened it, to pull out two coins and then a small worn piece of paper with a number handwritten on it in pen.

Needs to be an outside line anyways… He thought, as he looked over the phone number. His fingers were pushing the coins into the slot, before he lifted the receiver up to his face and dialed the number written down. The phone only rang once before a man’s voice answered.

“What is it?” Gajeel wasted no time in getting the words out, his voice coming out firm.

“We need to meet… NOW.” He demanded panting. He waited as the man on the other end paused for nearly a full minute, before answering.

“Okay…” The man replied, finally accepting Gajeel’s demand “Where?” The voice questioned, getting straight to the point.

“I’ll come there. I need you ta look up the number fer a cab service I can call…” Gajeel told him as he picked up a pen that was chained to the phone booth. He leaned his small paper up to the side window of the booth and got ready to write.

“Just tell me where you are and I’ll send one…” The voice replied urgently as if trying to get off of the line.

“No!” Gajeel growled. “Gimme a damn number!” He ordered, his tone unforgiving. He could hear the man sighing reluctantly on the other end, but he could also hear the clicking of keys.

Gajeel didn’t care if he was being difficult. He had made sure to make note of Levy’s address upon
Levy was pushing a hand over her forehead and through her sopping wet hair as she attempted to rinse the last of the soap out. Her head angled up as she closed her eyes, the water was falling over her face and streaming down in paths across her skin. Her nose breathed in the steam, allowing her to reach a place of serenity as it warmed her from the inside. There was a tingling coming from the wound on her head, but she was able to ignore it while in the midst of her relaxed state. The heat and privacy was granting her mind a certain freedom she wouldn’t normally allow herself, due to her usual logical mindset.

Her hand was sliding down, her fingers sweeping along her own hairline beside her ear, before they moved towards the center of her neck. The tips paused there over her own throat as her eyelids lifted lazily. She opened them halfway as she subconsciously pursed her lips; the ghost of sensation was pressed up against her skin. Gajeel’s thumb, digging deep against the spot her fingertips rested on now, cutting off her voice as his teeth sunk into her flesh.

Levy’s head angled to one side, her eyes narrowing as her fingers brushed down to the place he had bitten her. She could feel it in her skin, the disturbance his fangs had left; causing a slight shudder as she relived the pain she had endured during that moment. She closed her eyes once again, her head shifting down as her chest heaved.

She had been trapped in a series of recollections about each thing Gajeel had inflicted on her that night since the moment she had stepped foot in the shower. The vulnerability and fulfillment of his every touch, was scaling over her naked body just as easily as each drop of water was. Waves of emotion were triggering memories and physical reactions from within her, as she relived them. They brought her a certain satisfaction that she wouldn’t normally indulge in, but it was freeing for once to not be above that, which everyone else had.

Levy wanted to just be human and to feel as such. She had been walking around like an empty shell for the past two years. A fake smile carved onto her face, as she went about her day-by-day, working hard to achieve her dream of becoming a doctor, with no rhyme or a reason to the loneliness that consumed her. Waiting for something to cave, that being either her hope or her sense of purpose.

Levy opened her eyes, her gaze settled on the water as it hit the floor of the shower around her feet, flowing towards the drain. Gajeel had given that to her, he had filled her with life again, even if she had gone through hell just to reach it. She was beginning to see why it may have all been worth it. Her arm was lifting up towards her sternum, her hand resting between her breasts as the water droplets slid off of her. She had no lingering regret about being with him, despite the darkness she knew he possessed.

No, if anything she was longing for his touch again, as she continued to relive the residual effects of his intent. The way he had stalked towards her naked, his stare pervading over hers, his expression resembling that of animal ready to strike. She could read the meaning as easily as the text of her favorite book. He had come at her right then, ready for another round, a continuation of their night together.

Levy knew that now, as sure as she knew her name, but it had been so shocking at the time. She hadn’t known what to do and she had responded with nothing, but panic. Her body at a complete stand still, as she had waited for him to do something. She hadn’t been expecting him to make any
kind of move, after the way he had voiced their agreement about it only being the one time.

Levy shook her head at the memory regretfully; the hand over her chest was gliding over her heart instead. The rhythm of its beat was increasing, as she once again felt the phantom touch of Gajeel’s caress. His hands moving over her body, his hot mouth pressing against her skin. She could have had more time with him if she had only seized that moment, before he pulled away.

Levy’s eyes were closing again, her cheeks beginning to burn as the idea took shape in her mind, in the form of new images and sensations. His large body was behind her own, as if he had just slipped inside the shower unheard. His hand was settling over the soft wet flesh of her stomach, as she felt his nakedness flush against her own. The water was running over the both of them, as Gajeel ran his hands up and down over her torso, the stiffness of his length was pressing into her from behind, making her melt into his size as she took a shallow breath.

“Levy…” She heard him say her name like a low growl. She couldn’t breathe well enough to speak back, which was fine, because he would have cut her off with the swiftness of his next move. His one hand was catching her under the chin and pushing her head back violently, so that she was forced to angle it back and look up towards him. Her wet hair was falling against his abdominals as her face now looked up into his. The heat of his breath was drawing near, as he brought his mouth down to push over hers. Levy’s form was stiffening with the anticipation of his kiss, so breathless and stimulated by it that she couldn’t even move. That was when she heard his voice again. “Open yer eyes.” He demanded and it was just as she did that, that it was all over.

Gajeel was gone and she was alone, her eyelashes were soaking wet with the water of the shower that was raining down over her face. Her body was in the position of fantasy. Her face angled up as she let out a staggered breath, the left-over feeling was still sitting on high in her stomach. Leaving her both deeply disturbed and turned on by it, so much so that her head snapped down. Her hand slapped against the facet of the shower, turning off the running water with great force, frustrated by her own musings.

Levy flung open the curtain of the shower, eyeing the door to the bathroom with a raised eyebrow. While it was true that her and Gajeel’s night was over, that didn’t mean that they couldn’t be together physically for the remaining time they had left with each other. Once Gajeel left, then that would be the opportune time for it to truly be done, but until then… The wheels in Levy’s mind were turning, making her act as she reasoned it all out. Why couldn’t they take pleasure in each other once more?

Levy was grabbing her towel off the rack and wrapping it over her dripping wet body, her eyes going back to the door. She tied it around herself as images of herself taking it off before Gajeel played through her mind. Her body was in the position of fantasy. She tied it around herself as images of herself taking it off before Gajeel played through her mind. She was suddenly feeling very brave, her body still fevered with the motivation of her fantasy and her memories of him. She reached for the door to the bathroom, gripping the knob and opening it slowly. She hesitated before stepping out, her nerves starting to interfere, but the pit inside of her was far too desperate to relive him, so she couldn’t stop.

“Gajeel…?” She began to speak softly, one hand gripping at her towel as she made her presence known to the small room that was her apartment.

Levy paused, her feet frozen as she began to look around the tiny room. All of the pent up sexual tension she had just been feeling, was deflating from her small form through a series of chills. Her wet skin was riddled with bumps as the coolness of the clear air, inside that room swept over her. Gajeel was nowhere to be found, his boots gone as well.

Levy’s mouth fell open, the air stuck like a thick paste, before she finally choked out an exasperated breath. Her eyes were darting around in disbelief, was he truly gone?
But... he... Her mind was stuttering as she tried to wrap her head around it. He told me I could look at his stitches again... She thought, the dread of realization was hitting her like a slap in the face, the sting resounding as Levy’s pulse continued to beat frantically.

He really had left. The only sign she could even find of him ever having been there was his abandoned cup of coffee. Which he had hardly drank, almost as if he had put it down as soon as she had started her shower. Levy swallowed hard, finally managing to pant out a few more breaths. After everything that had happened, Gajeel had really done this to her. He had disappeared, leaving her behind with not a trace, just like all of the others, all of his conquests.

Levy’s eyes moved down to the floor in shame, suddenly feeling like the biggest idiot in the world. Why was she acting surprised? Hadn’t she seen this coming? She must have been stupid not too... Her mind was hearing all of the words he had said to her the night before. It all just seemed so fabricated now, almost as if she had made the whole thing up, just like the fantasy.

Why the hell did I let myself believe you Gajeel...? She wondered. I must be a fool to think you wouldn’t do this to me... Especially when I know you as well as I do... Levy was shaking her head at all of the miserable thoughts, before she looked back towards the ceiling with a roll of her eyes. She let out a heavy sigh.

“Levy... You knew this was coming...” She replied sadly. It was true that it had crossed her mind that he might ditch her, as she knew it was very much in the realm of possibilities for someone like Gajeel. But still... For whatever reason, she hadn’t expected it like this. She had at least thought, she’d get to say goodbye to him.

“I guess... I just thought... He’d at least keep his word about letting me check his leg...” She mumbled, closing her eyes as she felt the worry of infection wash over her for the umpteenth time. Please be careful Gajeel... Wherever you are... She opened her eyes; her innermost thoughts were beginning to scold her for such a line of thinking.

Stop...! Stop worrying over him Levy!... You idiot... He’s a jerk! Even if he did save you... Levy tilted her head; guilt and confusion making her bring a hand up to her stomach. She hadn’t any idea what to think of Gajeel now and the inner turmoil of it, was making her feel sick. Levy shook her head, hopelessness settling in as she brought a hand up to the pulsing cut on her temple. You’ve got other things to worry about... You’ve got to find a way to work today...

“Right...” She answered her own thoughts out loud, as a way to bring her strength. Her sights were coming back up, that was when something caught the corner of her eye. Wait... Levy’s head snapped back over in the direction of her desk and there on the surface lay Gajeel’s black brass knuckles, completely forgotten about. Levy’s eyes narrowed in on them, confusion and fear gripping at her, as she stared at the objects unsure of what to make of them, and what it could it possibly mean.

Gajeel was stepping out of the cab, his sights settling over the old white-bricked building that was the police station. His brow lowered as he slammed the car door shut behind him. He staggered out onto the curve; his robust arms were clenching on either side of his large frame, as he eyed the station intently.
It was just a building away, located on the busy street corner of downtown, on the southern side of Magnolia. People were walking around, wearing light jackets and carrying shopping bags as they moved about their day. There was a restaurant across the street, with large bay windows full of people enjoying Sunday lunch. Gajeel stood among them, completely stationary as he contemplated his next move. A visual thorn when pitted against the average citizens of Magnolia, his glowering and heavily pierced face not meant for the light of the sun.

“…Gajeel…” A hissing reached his ears, making his eyes narrow as his head shifted from side to side in search of the owner of the voice. That was when he spotted a figure he recognized, standing just to his left in a narrow alleyway.

The man was of average height and build, but his chest was well defined. The most noticeable feature about him was his unique two-toned hair. The majority of it was a rich black, but there was also a large section of it that was a sleek, polar white. It was pulled back into an almost samurai like ponytail with the exception of his sweeping bangs. The structure of his face was well balanced; youthful cheeks and a sharp protruding chin. His skin was pale and his eyes were so dark that they looked black. He was wearing black slacks with a white dress shirt tucked into them; the sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. He was also dawning a tie around his neck and a shoulder holster armed with two guns and a shiny badge, pinned to the belt of his pants.

He stood there, matching eyes with Gajeel, before glancing around uneasily to make sure nobody was watching them. He made a small hand gesture, before disappearing further into the alleyway. Gajeel shook his head with a roll of his eyes, before striding forwards, as best as his bad leg would allow him too. He slid into the alleyway, finally stopping just before the person who had summoned him there.

Gajeel’s back was facing the wall of one of the building’s they were standing between, as he turned to face the man who was shooting him an impatient glare. Gajeel’s own face was falling into a disgusted scowl, not seconds later.

“Couldn’t ya find a better spot Totomaru? This place reeks!” Gajeel choked out. His nose was scrunching up at the stench of a dumpster that sat beside them, he shook his head with a gag. Totomaru’s brow shot up at this, his eyes widening in disbelief.

“Are you kidding me Gajeel?! Hell no!” Totomaru snapped back. “We shouldn’t even be meeting at all! So just hurry up and tell me whatever it is, that you want, because I haven’t heard a damn thing about receiving a call from you…” The tail end of his sentence was drifting as he couldn’t help, but notice how Gajeel was shifting his weight from one foot to the other, in discomfort. His teeth were also biting down, as he seethed in pain. That was when Totomaru finally noticed the patch of dry blood in the fabric of Gajeel’s pants. “Hey… What the hell happened to your leg?” He asked, his eyes staying glued to the spot of blood. Gajeel clenched his jaw, his head whipping up violently at the man before him, with a look of warning.

“Nothin’! Just answer my questions!” Gajeel growled. His words were so rapid that Totomaru just looked up at him bewildered by it. “Is there a case involving the Celestial Night Club!? Shoulda been a battery charge, or an attempted murder on a man… or both…”

“Uh…” Totomaru began, feeling put on the spot.

“Nothin’! Just answer my questions!” Gajeel growled. His words were so rapid that Totomaru just looked up at him bewildered by it. “Is there a case involving the Celestial Night Club!? Shoulda been a battery charge, or an attempted murder on a man… or both…”

“Uh…” Totomaru began, feeling put on the spot.

“Think damn it!” Gajeel raged, his patience nonexistent.

“Wait yea! That was Ichiya’s new case!” Gajeel’s eyes widened, a small bit of relief was fueling him at this news, as he then closed them. At least I’m in the right place… He breathed out a little. It’s a start… He was thinking, “Wait a second… Why are you asking? Were you involved in that?”
Totomaru asked, interrupting Gajeel from his thoughts with a raised eyebrow.

“Doesn’t matter!” Gajeel answered back as he opened his eyes. “I need you ta get a piece of evidence fer me! A cell phone that was found at the club, you understand?!” Gajeel demanded, his voice full of urgency.

“What?! No! How the hell am I supposed to do that?!” Totomaru questioned back.

“Yer in there! I don’t care how! Just fuckin do it Totomaru!” Gajeel demanded, his stare was hardening on the officer, as he clenched a fist. “What the fuck is the point of havin’ you in there, otherwise?!” Gajeel added. His anger was spiraling into a whirlwind of spite, as he spat each word like rapid fire. Totomaru’s hands were whipping to his sides out of frustration at Gajeel’s irrational request.

“I can’t Gajeel! I don’t know what fucking world you live in, but I can’t just take another detective’s case evidence!” Totomaru shouted back. “Besides, what the hell do you need it for?! What did you do?!” Totomaru barraged, as he threw an accusing finger back in Gajeel’s direction “Obviously, Jose doesn’t know about this! I would have heard about it if he did!” Totomaru added, his hand dropping. “I can only imagine how angry he will be, once he finds out whatever the hell it is, that you are up to!” Totomaru stopped, his head was going back as he took Gajeel in with a gloating expression. “Imagine his disappointment! His number two keeping secrets from him!” Totomaru couldn’t help, but smirk. “How the mighty have fallen…” He added quietly as he leaned forwards, earning him a look of death.

There was no time to react as Gajeel’s hand came reaching forwards, like lightning. His fingers were tensing around the front of Totomaru’s dress shirt as he yanked the smaller man forwards, towards him, so that their faces nearly touched, eyes deadlocked. Gajeel’s fangs were jutting out as he seethed, the beast unleashed.

“So brave behind your threats…” His words were low and icy as he watched Totomaru’s eyes widen. Then without warning Gajeel was shoving Totomaru’s back against the dumpster. Knocking the wind out of him, as his hand still gripped at the fabric of his supposed comrade’s, dress shirt. “You are goin’ to do what I say damn it!” Totomaru groaned as Gajeel pushed on him further “Or am I gonna have ta fuckin kill you Totomaru?!” Gajeel roared, his eyes blazing. You will help me, you fuck head or you will know fear…

Gray had just made his way out of the sister station of Magnolia. His work with the odd detective Ichiya finally over, leaving him with nothing to show for it, but a pounding headache. His dark eyes were still adjusting to the bright light of afternoon, after having been inside for hours listening to Ichiya’s suave voice and watching a whole series of the little man’s strange poses.

Man… Doesn’t that guy ever let up…? He thought with a scowl as he walked down the street, away from the bustle that surrounded the station. It’s a wonder they get anything done over there… He couldn’t help but think, as he realized how much time had gone by. His brain was drifting back to his partner Elfman, whom he had kept waiting.

What a waste of time… Gray’s mind added with a shake of his head and a sorrowful sigh. He had really been hoping to get some meaningful experience. Especially considering Ichiya’s status, but that just hadn’t been the case. If anything, the whole thing had just been a big distraction, keeping
him from his real work. At this rate how would he ever get promoted?

Just as the thought entered Gray’s mind a loud crashing sound invaded his ears, followed by shouts. Gray’s eyes widened as he was very near the source, it sounded like it was echoing just a few feet ahead.

Gray sprinted forwards, his head turning back and forth in search, as he gritted his teeth. Where... Where are you?! His hands lowered instinctively over the gun at his side as he ran forwards, before finally hearing another shout. The words were clearly a threat as he had distinctively heard someone say the word, ‘kill’.

Gray stopped as realization hit him, the alleyway! He had just passed it, and he could still hear the echoes resonating. He turned back swiftly, his back pressing up against the corner of one of the buildings. His ears were alert and then he heard the voices. One was menacing and the other was drenched in fear. He pulled out his gun, holding it up and ready. Gray didn’t wait to hear what they were actually saying. His body was moving around the corner quickly. His arms were going down with the gun out in front. His eyes widened as he hesitated to speak.

One of the men he saw was a face he recognized from the station he had just been inside and the other was a large scary looking figure he had never seen before. The larger one, clearly had the officer on the ropes.

Gray’s hands tightened around his gun. His teeth were biting down, as fear gripped at him. He knew he might need to shoot this man. It looked as if he was assaulting the officer, but the problem with that was... Gray swallowed, his eyes wide. He wasn’t sure he could actually do it.

“DON’T MOVE!” He finally shouted, finding his voice behind all of the fear. Both figures paused, not having been aware that they were being watched.

Totomaru and Gajeel’s eyes widened, at the third voice in the alleyway. Both of them, had been caught off guard. Neither one knowing what to do for the moment.

“PUT THE OFFICER DOWN!” Gray managed to get out between breaths; he could feel his heart beating right through and out of his chest. “OR I’LL SHOOT!” He then threatened.

Gajeel was sitting there in disbelief at his terrible luck, knowing he was dead for sure. There wasn’t any reason why this officer shouldn’t shoot him down, right where he stood, what with being caught like this, in such a compromising position. Attacking another cop and yet, the shots never rang.

Totomaru’s head shifted so he could get a better look at the man, who had his gun aimed at Gajeel’s back. His thoughts finally clearing, after getting over the fact that he had been spotted with Gajeel. He was feeling some slight relief once he saw that it was only Gray, who was pointing the gun at them. So, long as the young officer didn’t know what was going on, the situation still seemed redeemable in his eyes.

“Don’t shoot!” Totomaru shouted. He could see Gray’s fear as he held the gun tightly. He could tell Gray had never shot anyone before, just from the look of terror in his dark eyes, let alone killed anyone. We might just be able to get out of this... “Not if you can’t keep your hands steady!” Totomaru added, genuinely not wanting to be shot.
My… My hands…? They’re… Gray’s thoughts were speaking as his arms stayed locked in place, his eyes were darting down, as they widened in disbelief.

His hands were trembling! He hadn’t even realized it, until the other officer had pointed it out. But… How?! No! This can’t be! How can I be this scared?! I’m finally seeing some real action and I- I can’t handle it?! Gray’s thoughts were screaming.

Gajeel had taken that opportunity to turn his head around and look at Gray, as the young officer battled with himself internally. His hands were slowly letting go of the fabric on Totomaru’s shirt. His arms were moving up and away from him, his palms and fingers were opening.

“I’m lettin’ go!” Gajeel yelled back, finally gaining Gray’s attention back. Gray watched, his eyes narrowing and his hands tensing, as he tried to gain control over his own body that was betraying him. Gajeel was slowly moving his hands up behind his head; they rested against his mane. “Don’t shoot!” Gajeel shouted.

Totomaru waited until Gajeel’s hands were up and behind his head, before he finally jumped into action. Gray tensed as he watched Totomaru straighten up and step around Gajeel, without a moment’s hesitation. His hands whipping up and grabbing Gajeel’s one arm down, both arms locking from his shoulder down to around Gajeel’s waist, like a seatbelt. His tight grip allowing him to pull Gajeel’s larger body down, twisting him with the other arm so that he was forced, face first, onto the cement. Totomaru then held the large man there, his own body pressed over the top of Gajeel’s back. He had Gajeel’s one arm twisted behind his back as well, before he glanced back up at Gray.

“Got cuffs!?” Totomaru questioned hastily. Gray stood there, shaking his head out of amazement and then irritation out of his own uselessness. He put his gun away, before reaching down and grabbing the cuffs off of his belt and running forwards.

Gajeel sat there underneath Totomaru, glaring and seething in pain. Forced to just sit there and take it, as the stitches in his leg burned. They were cuffing his wrists together and then forcing him up on his knees. He groaned heavily, as they forced him the rest of the way up. The movement being far too painful, as he got to his feet with both officers pulling at his elbows. Totomaru started to push Gajeel forwards, but Gray’s voice stopped him.

“Wait, we’ve got to search him.” Gray spoke as he came forwards. Totomaru rolled his eyes at this, once Gray wasn’t looking at him. The other officer was beginning the pat down.

Great! We are screwed…! Damn rookies! Always playin’ by the rules… Totomaru cringed in worry. He knew Gajeel was bound to have his pair of brass knuckles hidden somewhere on his person, as if they weren’t already in enough trouble as it was, without the illegal weapon on hand. He wasn’t sure how exactly he would get Gajeel out of this, but he knew he was going to have to find a way, even if he wasn’t really fond of him.

Gajeel could feel himself swallowing as he closed his eyes regretfully. He was going to be arrested. Not only that, but once they found his weapons, they would have even more charges to rack up.
against him. Would they even be able to connect him to Thibault? How the hell would he be able to do anything for Levy if he was sitting idly by, behind bars? He couldn’t even help himself out of trouble! Everything was falling far out of Gajeel’s control and he was internally panicking over the whole situation, that was until he heard the other officer speak.

“He’s clean.” Gray chimed, making Gajeel’s eyes open wide in shock. The memory was hitting him like the force of a blunt object; he hadn’t grabbed them! He had been in such a frenzy to get Levy’s phone back, that he had left his brass knuckles right there on her desk, without a second thought. Never in his life had he ever done anything like that! Leaving unarmed, his own evidence out for just anyone to find… In the worse of all places, no doubt. In Levy’s apartment.

He was supposed to be keeping her out of all of this and he was doing horribly! He couldn’t understand why either. Normally he was so level headed, but ever since last night, he had been letting anger drive him recklessly forward and it was costing him dearly. Not just him, but maybe her as well!

Gajeel was closing his eyes again, his head going up, as the air slid out of his throat. He didn’t know if leaving the brass knuckles behind was a curse or a blessing as he was now being arrested, so not having an illegal weapon was probably good, but leaving them with Levy was awful. So much for no more mistakes… His thoughts were interrupted as he realized the officer was addressing him.

“What happened to your leg? There is dry blood.” Gajeel’s eyes deadlocked to the dark cool ones of the young officer. “Are you injured?” Gray asked, but Gajeel kept his lips sealed, his silence earning a sigh from Totomaru.

“Just read him his rights kid, he isn’t gonna talk.” Gray shifted his gaze to Totomaru, who was holding onto Gajeel’s arm. He turned away from the two rattling off the words he knew so well, his mind elsewhere as he said them.

This might be a real case, assaulting an officer, the blood… Who is this guy? Gray wondered as he glanced down and stepped forward. He could hear Totomaru forcing Gajeel to walk behind him. His eyes were looking over his own hand, but what does it even matter if I can’t keep my cool? His thoughts questioned as he closed his hand into a tight fist, his head lifting up towards the patch of sky he could see between buildings. I’m sorry… I promise I’ll be better… I won’t let you down… Ur…

Levy was scurrying forward, the wind whisking through her blue hair, her cheeks reddening against the cold as she rounded the street corner. She inhaled sharply and quickly pivoted her foot to avoid running into a man who was walking by, his coat just brushing past her. He didn’t bother to stop moving but, managed to shoot her a glare from over his shoulder.

“Sorry…” She muttered quietly after nearly being trampled, a pant escaping her lips. The sky had become overcast as the afternoon played out and it was beginning to drizzle. The air was cold, but not cold enough for the light precipitation to become snow.

Levy bit down, her eyebrows lowering and her forehead crinkling with worry. I think I’m running late… She thought as the location finally came into view, 8-Island, the restaurant she worked at. There really was no way for Levy to know the time, seeing as she didn’t own a watch or have her phone.
She was moving into a jog, her apron and waitressing book tucked securely under her one arm. The air was chilling her legs as she trotted; the uniform she was dawning was an orange dress, the skirt only just reaching a few inches down her thighs. The stockings were tall over her legs, but their thin fabric did little to protect her from the elements. Her loose hair was bouncing with the movement of her steps. The headband that matched her uniform was clutched tightly between her fingers, inside the warmth of her coat pocket as she reached the door. She brought both arms up against it, struggling with all of her weight to push it open with her tiny frame.

Finally, she stumbled her way in, the heat and smell of food greeting her upon entry. She caught her balance, standing upright and glancing around the lobby of the restaurant unsuspectingly. She could hear the buzz of conversation from visiting patrons, but luckily nobody seemed to have noticed her clumsy entrance in the dim lighted room. Levy let out a sigh, her eyes going downcast as she gathered her bearings, prepared for a potential lashing from Mr. Yajima incase she was late.

“Levy…?” Came a familiar voice. Levy glanced up; there at the top of the small set of stairs, just past the lobby, stood two people she knew well.

Both of them were wearing the customary black and white dress attire, which was the male uniform for waiters who worked under Mr. Yajima. One had pale skin, while the other had a much darker complexion. The paler of the two was built very skinny, while the darker one was rather round and fat, the skinner one having been the person to speak Levy’s name. He was a carrot top, his hair tied up into a short spiky ponytail that resembled a little palm tree. His name was Sarusuke, but everyone knew him as Jet, as that was the nickname that had followed him throughout high school and beyond. The other fatter person, was Droy, his hair was a black stem that stood up like a little plant, its drooping bud hanging over his head.

Jet and Droy had known Levy for years, meeting her shortly after her parent’s deaths in a tragic car accident. These events causing Levy to move in with the grandparents on her mother’s side, as her father hadn’t had many living relatives left. Their house had been on the same street as Jet and Droy’s. The two boys were best friends and attending elementary school together when Levy showed up.

Levy had been pretty lonely during this time, despite the nurturing love of her grandparents. She was only eight years old and so she devoted herself to reading all of the time, to keep her mind occupied. Jet and Droy most definitely noticed her and finally one day at school, they finally approached her. From that day forth, they became inseparable, both boys following Levy everywhere, filling her with joy, as she had greatly needed their company. As they grew, this didn’t change, Levy seemingly taking charge, as both boys fell for her adorable charms, working wherever she did. Picking the same college as her, once she had her heart set on Mavis University. The school Makarov had formed, an old friend of her late grandfather’s.

Jet and Droy had been there for her through the passing of both of Levy’s grandparents and had now even ended up working at the same restaurant as her. They were always there for her when she needed them and she appreciated them deeply for this reason, but her feelings for them, had never gone anything past friendship. She had always viewed them more like brothers than anything, despite knowing that they both were infatuated with her, sometimes causing them to bicker and fight like children.

“Hey…” She replied softly, glancing down in shame as guilt consumed her. She had basically been ignoring them all week. She had been so upset by their actions from the previous weekend and the
bit of chaos it had caused her afterwards. It all seemed rather petty now, after everything else she had just gone through… She couldn’t help but feel bad for being angry with them about it now. She looked back up at them as they dawned her with deeply concerned faces. “Guys… I’m sorry…” She began. “For being mad… I’m over it.” Both boys were on Levy, before the words had hardly left her mouth, surrounding her with wide eyes, as they looked over her fearfully.

“Don’t worry about that! What are you even doing here?! And what the heck happened to you?!” Droy interjected before she could even say anything else.

Levy matched wide eyes with him, all of her worries coming forth as she thought about last night. He couldn’t know about any of what had happened, could he?! But then why was he looking at her, like he did…? She was staring at them completely tongue-tied, her complexion paling. How could she possibly explain it, when she couldn’t even comprehend it all herself?

“Levy?!” Droy questioned. Both of their faces were leaned in close to hers, in wait for her reply. “What happened?” He asked again, more calmly, his hand gesturing towards her face. Levy watched them completely perplexed and full of shock, her eyes gliding over to Jet, as his hand was coming up to settle over his own temple.

“Your head Levy!” Jet added, his hand landing on the spot of her wound on his own head. “You’re bleeding! Or… You were!” Levy mirrored Jet as he said this, her eyes still locked to his, her fingers gliding over the scabbed skin absent-mindedly.

She hadn’t covered it…? She had meant to, she had meant to put some kind of bandage over the large cut on her head, but had somehow managed to forget, while in her flustered hurry, to get ready. She hadn’t wanted to walk around town with it exposed, for all the world to see how awful it looked.

“It’s…” She began, not knowing what to say, now that they had seen it. “I…” She tried again, words failing her. “Fell.” She got out forlornly. Her eyes and hand dropped down at the poor excuse, causing both Jet and Droy to exchange exasperated expressions to one another, before they turned back towards her.

“How….?! How the heck did you manage that?!?” Jet questioned.

“Yea… and we tried to call you today! Many times! You never answered!” Droy spat.

“Yea… We didn’t know if you were still just mad… Or if you needed a ride today… But we were pretty worried that we didn’t hear back from you at all, on a work day!” Jet continued as Levy stayed quiet, her eyes still downcast, refusing to look back up at them. They both paused, waiting for her to reply in suspense, once more.

“I lost it…” Was all she managed, making Jet slap a hand to his forehead and Droy’s mouth to fall open.

“How….?! How the heck did you manage that?!” Jet questioned.

“Late?” Jet replied, his eyebrow arching as Levy looked to him with confusion.
“Yea… Well I thought… Maybe…” She choked out.

“Uh… You’re not late Levy.” Droy answered as he scratched his chubby cheek.

“What…? But isn’t it past four?” Levy asked.

“Um… No…” Jet replied tentatively, folding his arms, as he eyed her completely perplexed. “It’s only 2 o’clock Levy… Droy and I were working doubles today and we were supposed to come get you on our break… And besides, you don’t work at four… You weren’t supposed to come on until five tonight…” His response made Levy’s eyes widen. She shifted her stare back down, her head hanging in misery.

I… I must be losing it… She couldn’t help but think, as she let out a heaving breath. Okay, so maybe she couldn’t keep it together as much as she had tried, she was still falling apart. It couldn’t really be helped, considering her crazy circumstances and she really had been doing all right, up until the point Gajeel had walked out on her. His disappearance being the thing to really throw her for a loop, as getting ready and traveling were hardly memorable to her after he had left.

Gajeel had been the one thing keeping her calm throughout the whole venture, because she hadn’t felt so alone while in his presence. His constant assurance and confidence in such situations, being very much needed along with the distraction he provided, but after he was gone… She was left with nothing to keep her head from swelling with it all, leaving her in a state of haze. His sudden absence fueling the last bit of air needed, to cause her blimp of a head to burst.

Levy shook herself out of such thoughts, knowing she shouldn’t dwell on it and she really was trying not to, but she felt like a complete and utter mess at the moment. She looked up to her two oldest friends, who were both eyeing her carefully as if unsure of what she would say next. Her mouth opened to speak, but she couldn’t think at all, no words forming.

“Levy?” Droy started. “You really don’t look so good right now… Are you feeling okay?” He asked.

“What was I? Was I supposed to…?” She stuttered. Her hand going up to her forehead, as she tried to pull words from her normally loaded vocabulary. Jet stood up straight, as he watched her struggle.

“Uh… Okay.” Jet began, with finality in his voice. “Uh… Droy, go speak with Mr. Yajima. Tell him Levy isn’t feeling good, so she won’t be coming in tonight… And that I need to take my break now… Cause I’m going to go drive her home. Cover my last two tables… They’re just about done anyways. One should be asking for the check any minute now.” Jet ordered, making Droy nod at him.

“Right! Okay!” He cheered. “Take care of Levy, that’s most important!” He added a hand on his best friend’s shoulder. Jet nodded at him in response, before Droy ran off. Levy watched Droy disappear with a mesmerized stare, her eyes meeting Jet’s black ones, as his gaze hardened on her.

“I don’t know what’s going on with you Levy, but you are definitely not okay… You can’t work like this.” He scolded, his eyebrows lowering. Levy’s stare faltered, as she knew he was absolutely right. She didn’t know what she was thinking anymore, she needed time to sort things out and luckily, he was a good enough friend to see that when she couldn’t. “Wait here… I’m going to go clock out and get my coat and keys… Then we’re out of here.” He ordered, turning away to go do as he said.
“Thank you, Jet…” Levy murmured, as Jet strode away. He hadn’t bothered her anymore for the moment, but she could tell from the look in his eye that it wasn’t over. He was definitely going to be asking her far more in the car, but the issue was that she couldn’t tell him anything… Even as much as she wanted to…

*I’m sorry…* Levy’s thoughts apologized to Jet’s retreating back; tears that didn’t shed were stinging at her eyes.  

*It’ll be okay… It isn’t the first time you’ve kept secrets from them…* Her thoughts reminded her, but somehow that didn’t bring her any comfort, as she thought about each time she had met Gajeel and kept his existence in her life, nonexistent.

A woman was standing before the Pegasus Blue Police station, an intense yet calm stare, unmatched by any other, pervading over the building with her large cobalt eyes. Her face was a mask, flawlessly white and devoid of emotion, while partially hidden in the cover of a pink parasol, as the light rain fell around her. Her features were elegant and almost doll like in nature. Her hair was a soft blue that hung down like waves, curling back up like the tide and framing her face perfectly.

She was wearing a tall navy, winter hat and a long winter-like dress coat, with long sleeves and beige fur at the ends of them. She was donning a small navy shall, that also had beige fur at its hem. It hung over her shoulders and reached up, concealing most of her neck. Perhaps her strangest item though, was the small white cloth she had hanging from her shall. It was a little ball with a face stitched into it. It’s overall appearance resembling that of a tiny handmade ghost.

This was Juvia Lockser, a woman of supposed great misfortune, as it was said she had been abandoned by everyone, but the rain, before Jose came into her life. What many didn’t know though, was that Gajeel was the only reason Jose had even found her and so that was why she was there. To fulfill her roll and help out her friend, who had landed himself into some major trouble.

She walked on, her movements serene as she glided like water, through the doors of the station. She closed her umbrella upon entering, shaking the drops of rain off, before stashing it away in the side pocket of the bag she had draped over her one shoulder. She made her way through security politely; her heightened gaze carrying over the room, taking in its every detail quietly.

She was keeping her eyes peeled for any sign of Totomaru, him being the one she wished to speak to. He had been the one to call and summon her there on Gajeel’s behalf, but he was nowhere in sight. Finally, a large window came into view, Gajeel was sitting at a table on the other side of it. His arms folded, as he looked very impatient. The room he was in, was empty and very plain as it was used for interrogation.

Juvia stepped up before the glass; Gajeel was looking upwards, his sights set on the ceiling. His foot was tapping as he sat there in wait, with knees apart, seemingly antsy. She knew he couldn’t see her, as it was a one-way mirror. She could hear footsteps approaching, so she turned away from the window.

“Hello…” She spoke, addressing the man before her. “My name is Juvia Lockser… I am the legal advisor for Mr. Redfox…” Her words drifted seamlessly, her voice wrought with distance.

“Really…? Should have known I guess… Since he wasn’t talking and stuff…” Gray replied, mumbling the last part, as he scratched the back of his head. His hand dropped down, as he eyed her suspiciously. “But… He hasn’t even made a call yet…” Gray added, his voice darkening out of uncertainty.
“You must be the arresting officer…” Juvia responded calmly. “I insist you let me speak to my client, in private…” She demanded, though her words were dreamy, they still held a certain edge to them as well. Gray’s face pulled into a deep scowl. The threatening demeanor she possessed was not lost on him. He looked over her relaxed expression, yet profound stare, with a foreboding glance of his own.

“Listen lady… I don’t know how you knew to come here already…” His tone was deepening with danger as he stepped forward. “Besides the point… You go ahead and do what ya want…” Juvia hastened, as Gray came near. “But don’t be expecting us to let him go…” Gray’s eyebrows lowered as he continued. “Not when I first handedly, caught him assaulting one of the officers, who works here…” His superior height was allowing him to look down upon her, with how close they were standing. “His stonewalling won’t save him… And neither can you…” Gray pointed at Juvia, his dominance shining, unaffected by her proud stance. “He’d be better off, for settling on a plea deal.” His words were coming out like ice, as he leaned in closer to her face. “I’ll put him away myself…” He finished defiantly as he pointed at his own chest with his thumb.

The reverberation of his voice was so low and quiet as he scowled at her threateningly, his gaze ruthless and unforgiving. Juvia’s eyes actually widened as they matched stares. She could feel the chill of his intent moving through her, as they stood only a mere foot apart, feet planted.

Finally, after a solid thirty seconds of staring, Gray straightened back up to his full height, his lip curling up at her silence. A slight shade of pink was tinting Juvia’s cheeks; Gray imagined it was out of anger. He watched her move closer; he braced himself for a comeback of equally impending words to rival his own, but was doubly surprised when her feet instead, carried her right past him.

“Well okay… I guess I won’t bother then!” She called back from over her shoulder. Her voice was light, contrary to how it had sounded not minutes before, when she was making demands. Gray’s eyes widened and his mouth fell open in shock, as he watched her retreat back the way she came.

“Wa-Wait!? Where are you going?!” Gray hollered after her.

Why... Why is my heart beating so fast? Juvia was questioning, her eyes going downcast, as she stayed turned away from him. Her hand was resting over her heart; she could feel the rapid rhythm of it inside her chest. Her face was warming as she pictured the young officer’s determined face, once more.

Something about the look in his eye resonated within her, waking something from deep within. She had been able to read him and she had never once seen anyone look at her like that before. It was somewhat intimidating and yet she found it admirable as well, like he wouldn’t back down no matter what. As if his first impression of her was one of meaning and it was…

He viewed her as a very real obstacle and so, he needed to come on strong in order to scare her away. Juvia wasn’t used to people seeing her at all, let alone standing up to her as if she was a force to be reckoned with. Treating her as an equal and worthy opponent. She normally just blended in, like a single drop of rain among a downpour.

“Wait Juvia!” She heard him call after her and she paused. Her head was going up, as her fingers squeezed into a tight fist. He had remembered her name. Not only that, but she couldn’t help, but feel tinge of joy at the sound of his voice saying it.

I... I’ve never felt this way before... Juvia’s mind recognized as she turned back around. He was trotting back towards her, his eyes wide over her own, once he stopped. Juvia’s blush was very apparent now as she watched him with mouth slightly agape, waiting for him to speak. She felt out of breath, as her eyes suddenly took notice of how attractive his features were.
“Oh… Sorry Mrs.-was it, Lockser?” He was questioning, Juvia’s eyes immediately fell away from his face.

“It’s just Miss… But Juvia is fine…” She looked back up towards him, her voice soft. “In fact, I prefer that.” She added, making eye contact with him.

“Ah… Okay… Well…” Gray spoke, his hand going up behind his head, as if he was embarrassed. He glanced away as he continued. “If you leave, we’ll have to elect our own attorney for your client.” Gray paused. “So… Can’t imagine that going over well…” Gray matched eyes with her again. “You better go talk to him… It’s within your rights after all.”

Juvia’s eyes widened, why was he being so nice now?! She didn’t understand, was he maybe just a good person? He was a policeman after all, but she didn’t know most cops to be friendly towards attorneys, who were there to get criminals back on the streets. She looked towards him in awe, unsure of what to say or do.

You came here to get Gajeel out remember…? Her thoughts reminded her. Oh right… She looked back towards the young officer before her, besides, it's not as if you are actually going to get to know this guy... Yes... I need to focus on the task at hand. It is my duty... She thought, her eyebrows lowering in determination.

“Yes… Then I shall.” She spoke suddenly. She was again stepping forward, brushing past him, making Gray’s expression change to one of shock as he watched her B-line it towards the interrogation room.

What's with this chick...? Gray was questioning with a raised eyebrow, as she once again, took on a detached demeanor. She stopped just before the door, her hand on the knob as she looked back towards him. His eyes widened as he noted her emotionless stare once more.

“No listening in.” She ordered, the edge to her voice had returned. Gray's mouth fell open as if he was about to speak, but she was quickly disappearing behind the door before he could. He watched it slam shut, his head shaking in confusion, his teeth coming together.

“That was weird…” He muttered out loud. This day just keeps getting stranger and stranger… He couldn't help but think, with a sigh as he thought about the club, the peculiar detective Ichiya and then the incident in the alleyway that had landed him there.

Still... The name Redfox... Why’s it seem so familiar to me? I know I’ve never met that guy before... Because I sure as hell, would remember a man who looked like that... Gray wondered as he pictured Juvia speaking to him in regards to their suspect, Gajeel Redfox. Hmm... How does someone like her, end up defending someone like him...? Gray paused out of confusion, no apparent answer available to him, but one thought remaining supreme.

Juvia... His mind repeated, as he imagined her face once more. Beautiful name for an odd woman.

Juvia slammed the door behind her shut, her back falling against it. She was weak in the knees and quivering with pent up emotion. Her sights were on the ceiling, her brain caught somewhere between fantasy and panic as her face practically glowed red. She opened her mouth just to breathe, almost as if she needed to remember how.

He... He's so amazing... Her mind was swooning, as she shuddered. I can't believe I just spoke to him like that! Will he ever forgive me?! She questioned in great concern now, as she thought about
the way she had yelled at the handsome, dark haired officer, who she hadn’t learned the name of just yet. I’ll have to do something to make it up to him! Oh, but there’s so much I don’t know… So, what could I possibly do?! We just met! Think Juvia, think!

“Rain woman?” A familiar voice sounded, breaking Juvia’s train of thought, as her eyes finally matched the deep crimson ones of Gajeel. He was sitting at the table, his arms folded and a raised studded brow on her. Clearly not understanding how she had just randomly showed up, his eyes scaling over her in puzzlement. “What are ya doin’ here?” He asked, his voice rough as always. “And why the hell is yer face so red?” He asked next, his tone skeptical.

Juvia could feel all traces of happiness leaving her, as she looked at him. She had basically forgotten he was even there. Gajeel’s presence officially bringing her back to reality, with the same harshness that his voice carried as she once again remembered the problem she was having to deal with, because of him.

“Oh…. It’s nothing!” She answered, her hands shaking in front of her. “Everything is perfectly fine…!” She added rapidly, doing a horrible job of hiding the crazy. Gajeel just shook his head at her, not really caring in the slightest, but still he found her behavior a bit odd. “Totomaru called me here…” She finally answered, her head bowing, as she fell into the normal calmness that was her personality.

For as long as Gajeel had known Juvia she had always carried herself very modestly, with little to no, outward emotion. Although he knew her well enough to know that wasn’t how she really was on the inside. She was actually a very passionate human being, but she often struggled on how to portray it, because of her lack of upbringing.

“Oh yea...? Well then did ya get that other dumb cop…” Gajeel started. “What was his name…?” He questioned, his eyes shifting upwards as he pondered it. “Fullbuster… Er somethin’, ta let me go?” Gajeel asked, closing his eyes upon remembering.

“Fullbuster…?” Juvia repeated softly, her cheeks still pink. “Was that his name…?” She asked lightly. Gajeel cracked open an eye at her.

“I dunno… What’s it matter?” He asked. “That idiot is the whole reason I’m in here!” Gajeel was yelling with both eyes open now.

“Don’t blame him, Gajeel!” Juvia snapped, a finger pointing at the man across from her with a wild fury in her tone. Her stance was strong and full of malice as if he had hurt her, with the words he had just uttered. Gajeel blinked at her in confusion, Juvia wasn’t normally quick to anger. She was usually pretty stoic and used to Gajeel’s blunt mannerisms, so seeing her this way, was definitely a little more than surprising for him.

“What the hell is wrong with you?! Ya like him or somethin’?!” Gajeel questioned in both disbelief and irritation. “Why the hell shouldn’t I blame him?! He’s the one who fuckin arrested me Juvia!” Gajeel raged back, both hands slamming down onto the table, as his voice echoed within the small room.

“No Gajeel!” Juvia countered back, equally loud. “You were careless!” She accused once again, pointing at him, making his eyes go wide as he bit down in frustration. Juvia leaned forwards, her hands bracing the table and her head nearing his some. “Totomaru told me everything! You called
him for an undisclosed meeting! Then you lost your temper and were caught with your hands on him!” Her voice had quieted some, but she was still scolding him. She straightened back up, calming considerably. “You don’t need me to tell you how serious this is Gajeel… You messed up and you better tell me why.” Juvia finished defiantly, her eyes boring into his with the stare he knew all too well. Silence took over for a few seconds, as Juvia allowed time for her words to take heed.

Gajeel knew Juvia could read in-between the lines. She knew secrets were involved, ones she was expecting him to divulge to her, now that he was in trouble. Normally she would try and stay out of everything business related, unless her legal know-how was needed. But what she didn’t know was, that this was personal.

Gajeel had been trying to use his business pull, for personal benefit and she was right, it had made him careless. Hell, he had been a walking disaster, running around town on a bum leg, in an effort to quickly and quietly clean up a mess he started, over a girl… How could anybody know about that? And worse, how was he going to fix it now? Gajeel glanced up at Juvia, her eyes were on him, as she waited patiently for him to speak.

Juvia was Gajeel’s oldest friend; he had known her since he was a teenager. He had easily been able to relate to her upon meeting, as they both knew what it was like to be abandoned by those they had once considered family. Jose had taken both of them in as well. First Gajeel and then Juvia upon Gajeel’s request and so, she was like a sister to him. She was one among only three people, whom he really trusted and considered his friends, one of the other three now being Levy. There wasn’t anyone who knew Gajeel better. Even Master Jose, who had Gajeel’s greatest respect didn’t understand him like Juvia did.

If there was anyone he could count on, it was her. The idea was forming in his head, as he thought about this. He knew if he let Juvia know how dire the situation was, she would take care of it, with no questions asked. She was very capable, despite her own doubt. In fact, it was possible Juvia would more than likely have more sway over Totomaru than even Gajeel himself, as he wasn’t exactly on the best of terms with the other members of Jose’s organization. Many of them were jealous of his status, as he had basically become Jose’s right-hand man in the shadows.

“Fine…” Gajeel seethed. “I’ll explain, but first…” His head lowered, his eyes gravitating towards hers, with a very serious expression over his face. “Listen carefully and just do as I say.” Juvia matched his stare with wide eyes. It was rare that Gajeel came at her like this, but when he did, she knew it was very crucial she do as he ask. She nodded.

“Speak…” She replied.

“Totomaru… I need you to talk ta him.” He paused his voice was quieting. “There is a piece of evidence in this station right now, that I need him to steal back fer me… And I mean it…” His eyes widened. “He knows bout it already… It was the whole reason I was meetin’ with him, but he gave me a hard time…” Juvia shook her head.

“He didn’t mention that part.” She replied.

“No… course not. He wouldn’t… The ass…” Gajeel answered with irritation in his eyes. “I can’t stress the importance of this though. It’s a cell phone, that once the cops get inside… It’ll just be… Really bad…”

“I see…” Juvia answered, swallowing nervously as she looked over Gajeel. Now she understood. It was incriminating evidence that the police had somehow managed to get a hold of. Of what crime,
she didn’t know, nor did she want too. “What makes you think he’ll listen to me Gajeel?”

“He will. You are persuasive…” Gajeel answered as Juvia looked at him, doubtfully. “Well… He respects you, a lot more than me…” Gajeel added, thinking better of his previous statement.

“Maybe more than you, but enough to risk doing something like that?” Juvia asked.

“Just do it!” Gajeel demanded, taking Juvia aback with the urgency in his tone. “At least try! I’m countin’ on you Rain Woman! If it comes from you, he might think it’s coming from Jose! Then maybe he’ll actually do it!” Gajeel added as he sat back in the chair.

“So, Jose doesn’t know then?” Juvia questioned, confirming what she had already suspected.

“No.” Gajeel answered firmly. “And he can’t know.” He added, his brow lowering. She could see the look of desperation in his hard stare. His expression of pleading, resembling that of a scowl, but Juvia knew better. He was putting all of his trust into her, by making this request. She could see he had no other option and she instinctively knew that was the only reason why he would make such a dangerous demand of her. “I know you can do this… I know ya can get that idiot to get it back fer me….” He spoke. “And I need ya ta do it now… It can’t wait.”

“Gajeel?!” Juvia exclaimed. She hadn’t expected him to demand this of her immediately. “How can I do it now?! You’re in lock up!” Gajeel pointed at the door.

“Don’t worry bout me! Leave me in here all night, fer all I care, but this has gotta happen now! Before it’s too late! It’s already been in the cop’s possession all night! I can’t risk it, Juvia!” Gajeel barraged, the look on his face was jarring. Juvia had never seen him so rash and frantic before. It made her swallow past the nervous lump that had formed in her throat. What the hell had he gotten himself into?

“Well okay…” Juvia replied, making Gajeel’s expression ease mildly. “But what the heck do I tell Totomaru to do with it, once he takes it?! Juvia asked, her question making Gajeel freeze in alarm, as if he hadn’t thought that far ahead.

Shit… Gajeel was thinking, his eyes darting down, once again Juvia was right. Initially he had just planned on Totomaru giving the phone back to him, but that couldn’t happen if he was in lock up. He didn’t like the idea of discarding it for just anyone to find, as that seemed too risky. He glanced back up at Juvia, he knew having her keep it, would be a bad idea. She was too close to everything and everyone he didn’t want finding out. He needed that thing far away from everyone, where nobody would look.

His mind drifted back to Thibault’s knife and how he had left it with Levy, he had known nobody would be looking for it with her, so long as his promise was kept. If he could somehow get the phone back to her, where it actually belonged, then that would be the safest and best option. Almost as if she had never lost it, but he couldn’t do that with where he was now.

Wait… His mind spoke as he looked over Juvia, realization hitting him like an iron fist. He had promised to not let anyone even get a whiff of Levy’s scent, in his efforts to protect her, but Juvia was the one person whom he solely trusted. He could tell her where Levy lived and count on her not to reveal it, or anything else she found out about Levy to anyone.

“I got it…” Gajeel answered, his expression was one of shock. “Got a piece of paper?” He asked urgently.

“Of course.” Juvia answered. “Do you need one?” She questioned.
“I need ta write down an address.” He told her, his mind picturing Levy’s address that he had already memorized for the cab driver. Juvia quickly pulled out a small scrap of notebook paper and a pen for Gajeel on the table. Gajeel grabbed it and quickly jotted the number and words down. His hand was covering it, as he wrote and then he slid it over to Juvia along the table. His hand stayed over it, as he knew they were being watched. Juvia reached down to grab the paper, her eyes locked with Gajeel’s once her head was near. He held her stare with a glance, of the upmost significance.

“Take it to this address.” He demanded, finally lifting his palm off of the paper for Juvia to quickly scoop it up. “Tell nobody.” He added firmly, as he shook his head slowly.

Juvia straightened back up and quickly glanced down at the paper with a crinkled brow, before looking back up at Gajeel. She was now very worried that she had just been pulled into something very serious and very illegal. Her dealings in Jose’s business were only of the legal nature, strictly. She felt torn though, as she knew that whatever this was about, it was very important to Gajeel. He wouldn’t ask her to do such a task if it wasn’t, and she already felt like she owed him.

“Juvia…” He spoke again, gaining her attention back. “When ya go there… Not only do I need you to return the phone to the person who lives there… But I also need ya to grab somethin’ of mine in return... My most important possessions… I left em there… Get ‘em back.” He explained, making Juvia’s eyes widen in disbelief. She knew exactly what he was referring too and that suddenly explained a lot. Totomaru had mentioned him not having the brass knuckles when he had been arrested, which had actually been good, because it was one less charge.

“But Gajeel…? How…?” She asked. She had never known him to do anything so irresponsible, since they were kids, but Gajeel just shook his head.

“The rest will haveta come later Rain Woman… Fer now… I’m dependin’ on you.” Juvia froze, her eyes wide as she nodded at him, with a dazed expression over her face.

What kind of mess was this, that she was now getting involved in? Who was this man she would be seeing? Her mind pictured a fearsome looking mob boss with a suit and cigar, someone like Banaboster, but much scarier. She hadn’t any idea what to expect, but the worst possible scenario. Taking evidence from the police, stealing illegal weapons back? How could she think otherwise? This… This is what I get for working for a man like Jose… Came Juvia’s thoughts, as they settled over Gajeel.

“It will be done.” She answered; her voice was devoid of emotion, earning her a slight smirk from Gajeel.

Like I had any doubt Rain Woman? He thought confidently. I knew I could count on you…
“Tell me Officer Fullbuster, what is your first name?” She asked suddenly, glancing back up at him. Gray’s brow pushed together in confusion, as he tried to understand why she would ask him such a question. Was it some kind of attorney trick he didn’t yet know about? He didn’t see how it could be, so he instead decided to just answer her, as there was no obvious harm in the question that he could pick out.

“My name is Gray.” He replied.

“Gray…” She repeated his name gently, her eyes staring off, almost as if she was in a world of her own. Then she looked back up at him. “Gray… I need to speak to the assaulted officer.” She told him, her voice stressing the importance of her request with its weight, but unfortunately, Gray did find fault in it.

“I didn’t give you permission to call me that!” He snapped, glancing away. “And no…. That’s not a good idea.” He replied sharply.

“It’s fine.” Came a third male voice from over Gray’s shoulder, causing both Juvia and him to turn around and see whom it belonged to. There stood Totomaru himself. “I’ll allow it.” Totomaru added as he stepped closer.

“What?!” Gray exclaimed, his head tilting in confusion as his arms hung in disbelief. Juvia was already walking around Gray and stepping up towards Totomaru, with a knowing look in her eye.

“Hold tight Fullbuster. I’ll be back.” Totomaru replied. Gray could only watch in complete misunderstanding, as the two began to walk away. Juvia shot him one last meaningful glance from over her shoulder, as Gray stood with feet planted and jaw clenched in frustration.

Why do I feel like there’s something here I’m not quite getting? He questioned internally as he watched Juvia look back ahead. His fists were forming into tight balls at his sides, not a damn thing seemed to be going right today.

It had been twenty minutes of silence and Levy knew her time was running out. Jet hadn’t spoken nearly the whole drive back to her apartment and there was only about ten minutes left in their commute based on the current traffic. She could feel the tension between them as Jet just drove on. The only sounds consisting of the hum of the engine, the window shield wipers moving and the occasional gearshift as his car was a stick.

Levy knew she could very well be the one to break the awkward quietness, but she really hadn’t any idea what to say, seeing as she knew she couldn’t tell him what he wanted to know. She occupied herself instead with staring out the passenger side window, as Jet kept his eyes forward on the road. Finally, after what felt like an eternity Jet addressed her.

“Levy…” He began, gaining her eyes back on him. He kept his stare forward as he continued. “You know you can come to us, right? Droy and me?” He questioned. There was a pause as Levy turned her head away from him. Her eyes landing on her own hands, that were settled over her waitressing book and apron, over her lap, forlornly.

“Of course, Jet…” She answered. “I have never doubted that.” She added, making him turn to look at her slightly, out of the corner of his eye.

“So…” He started. “If you were in some kind of trouble then… You’d let us know, right?” Levy’s
hands were tightening over the apron and book as she braced herself for the pain. She didn’t want to lie to him; she wanted to do the right thing. Problem was, she wasn’t sure what the right thing to do was, anymore.

“I’m okay Jet…” Came her reply. “Please don’t worry.” She pleaded, her head looking back up at him.

“See.” He answered looking back at her, before glancing back up at the road again. “That’s not what I asked.” He added firmly, his tone was drenched in worry.

“Jet…” She stated his name, to keep him from pressing her further. “Please don’t ask me anymore.” She requested.

“But something happened!” He suddenly exclaimed, fed up with the go around from her. “I know it did! I can see it all over your face!” He added, his patience gone. “Where did that wound come from, Levy?! Did someone hurt you, it looks really bad?!” He finished, as he could no longer keep his cool.

“Don’t you think I know that!” She snapped so loudly, that it made the injury on her head pulse, as all of her anger came pouring out. “I can’t tell you okay! So, stop asking me now!” Her throat was stinging from the volume of her yells in the tiny car. Silence fell over them once again, the tension even worse than before, until finally Levy spoke again. “Don’t…” She started, her voice cracked with the weight of tears. “Don’t ask me to lie to you, because that is what you are driving me to do.” She choked out.

It was true, she knew she might have to keep a secret and potentially lie to her friends, but this was a lot harder, than she had ever imagined it to be. It wasn’t in her to lie normally, she wasn’t raised that way and so she was poor at it for that reason. Jet could see the inner turmoil inside of her and it made him hurt as well. He looked back ahead, his eyes narrowing in sadness.

“This is serious…” He replied. “It’s gotta be…” He added, as they both matched eyes. He looked truly upset; she could see a gloss film over his eyes. “Because I know you… And you wouldn’t do this, if it wasn’t.” He said making Levy turn away and look back out the window, as she tried to keep in her own tears.

“Then as my friend… Don’t push me any further.” She requested, her voice wavering. “I need you guys to understand, when I ask you to drop it.” Jet was looking back at the road; his thoughts were spiraling into madness.

“Only if you can promise me that it’s over now, whatever ‘it’ is.” He stated. “That however you ended up hurt, won’t happen again…” He reiterated.

“It is…” She replied softly, her eyelids lowering as she felt the sting of regret for everything that had happened. “I meant it when I said I’m okay…”

“You’re not.” Jet scolded, making Levy turn back to look at him with her eyebrows lowered. “I’ve never seen you such a mess before, not since your grandparents died at least.” Jet told her firmly.

“Gee… thanks.” She replied bitterly, her voice dry. She knew he was right, but hearing it was hard. She felt so weak, allowing the circumstance of last night to leave her in such a state of pity.

“It’s the truth.” He spoke, making Levy’s head hang in defeat.

“I know…” She admitted, her voice soft. “I’m sorry… I tried… I just didn’t want you guys to worry.”
“You don’t have to be sorry, Levy. That’s the last thing we want from you. Again… Just… Be okay…” Jet answered as he looked towards her, they had finally reached her street.

“I will be…” Levy replied. “You were right though… Work wasn’t an option for me today. I need a little time to recover, even if it’s just a day’s worth of it…” Levy explained, as the car was slowing down, her building coming into view.

“Okay well… We won’t bother you about it anymore, as promised, but only if you stay out of trouble…” Jet explained as he looked back at her. “And if you need anything, let us know.” He added with a slight smile. The car was just coming up on the curve.

Levy smiled back, a warm feeling was building inside of her chest out of relief. She once again felt grateful for his and Droy’s presence, in her life. They could sometimes get on her nerves, but they truly were her best friends.

“Yes…” She answered softly, as the car rolled to a stop, just outside the door of her apartment complex. Jet looked up, when his eye caught sight of something.

“Say Levy… Someone’s outside your door… Who is that?” He asked, making Levy glance up and out the car window, as well. “One of your neighbors?”

There outside the door of her apartment complex stood a woman, whom Levy had never seen before. She was wearing blue winter-like attire and had a pink umbrella over her head, to shield her from the bit of rain that was coming down. Levy’s eyebrow lifted in confusion, as she reached for the door handle of the car.

“No, I have no idea who that is…” She huffed. “I’ve never seen her before…” She started to open the door. “Well… Better go check it out huh? Thanks for the ride Jet.”

“Wait!” Jet hollered out, as Levy stood up and got out of the car, her still loose hair was dampening, due to the falling rain. “You sure you’ll be okay?” He asked, an arm reaching out toward her. Levy sighed, a soft smile over her face, making Jet blush as he looked towards her. She picked up her apron and book, her head tilting.

“Yes Jet… I’ll be okay. Thank you… Now get back to work, before you’re late.” She prompted, making Jet just nod at her, as if in a trance.

“Right.” He told her, Levy giggled lightly, shutting the car door and waving. She stood among the rain as he started to pull away, watching until he was some ways down the street, not caring that she was getting wet. She was already a wreck, what was a little water at this point?

She turned around, finally letting out a breath, her eyes on the door of her complex and the woman in question, who was still standing in front of it. Hmm… Maybe she’s looking for someone? Levy thought, finally working up the nerve to walk forwards. The woman turned upon hearing Levy’s footsteps, Levy paused, not wanting to get too close, as she didn’t know this person. She was met with a very pronounced stare, the likes of which she had never seen, as the woman’s cobalt eyes waved over her with great significance.

“Hello…?” Levy uttered timidly. The woman was beautiful, her skin very white and her hair a rich blue, that shined. Levy stepped forwards slowly, still put off by the intense emotionless look of the woman’s eyes. “Can I help you with something?” She questioned politely, trying her best not to be rude.
Juvia looked over the small girl who had approached her with a blank expression. She hadn’t any idea who she was, but she was certain that this was no place for someone like her. Her soft almond eyes were gracing Juvia with a hint of apprehension, as she spoke to her in a kind voice. Her efforts to be friendly were not lost on Juvia, but they concerned her, as the area they had found themselves in, didn’t seem to be the safest. In fact, Juvia was sure it wasn’t, considering the reason she was there. This girl was so small that Juvia couldn’t even get a solid read on her age. She turned back to look at the door that she couldn’t figure out how to access and then back to the girl in confusion.

“You shouldn’t be here…” Juvia spoke.

Levy’s eyebrows were coming together at the woman’s strange words. Her voice was serene, yet still held a certain authority to it, as well. Levy maybe, should have been offended or upset by such a statement, but for some reason, she didn’t sense any harm from the person before her, and so she remained calm.

“I live here…” Levy replied, her tone easy, as she took a few more steps forwards. She watched as the woman’s eyes widened and her lips pursed in question, as if that hadn’t been the answer she was expecting.

Juvia was looking over the large noticeable cut across the girl’s temple, now that she had moved closer. The wound was rather alarming, like a smudge of dirt on a beautiful piece of art. She could see now, that the girl, though youthful, was not a child, just very petite. It still didn’t explain why someone like her would live in such a dump of a place, where supposed mob activity could be going down. Perhaps this girl didn’t have much to her name and was stuck? Juvia pondered the thought, but she really didn’t know.

“Oh… I’m sorry.” Juvia spoke gently, truly sounding regrettable for her mistake. Levy couldn’t help, but smile at it, her eyes warming.

“It’s okay!” She responded lightly, her eyes closing happily. Juvia stood there unsure of what to make of the response, as she had expected Levy to be angry with her for her blatant rudeness. Levy’s eyes opened, the rain was still falling over her, but she didn’t care. “So, did you need to get inside? Were you visiting someone?” Levy asked.

“Oh yes…” Juvia replied nervously, her head snapping back to the door. “I need to stop at one of the rooms in this building, but I just didn’t know how to get in.” Juvia explained.

“Well I can help with that!” Levy answered, reaching for her key. Juvia watched as Levy held it up, with another upbeat smile. She stepped forwards, Juvia moved over to make room, as Levy got to work opening the door.

“Thank you…” Juvia spoke gently as Levy pushed it open, Levy turned to look at her with bright eyes.

“No problem!” She answered, allowing Juvia to walk in first. Juvia walked forwards, closing her umbrella as she stepped through the doorframe of the complex. Levy followed after her, closing the door tightly behind them, to make sure the auto lock clicked on, as Juvia shook the water off of her umbrella. Juvia was stashing her umbrella in her bag, as Levy turned back to face her.
“So… Which room do you need to go visit, I can tell you where it is?” Levy offered in her efforts to stay polite, as she noticed the woman’s eyes glancing around. Levy watched her look at the stairs behind her, before she then laid eyes on the first door, Levy’s door.

“Actually… Right there.” Juvia spoke, pointing at Levy’s door. “That’s the room I need to visit.” Juvia added as Levy’s mouth fell open in confusion. Juvia was bowing her head at Levy, in thanks. “So, thank you for your help…” She said, turning away from Levy.

“Wait!” Levy called after her, her hand reaching out to the woman. Her eyebrows pushed together in concern. “But… That’s my door.” Levy added, as the woman turned to look back at her. Juvia’s mouth was falling open in question, her eyes widening out of misunderstanding.

“Oh really?” She questioned as Levy nodded at her. “Well, that can’t be right then.” Juvia replied, her hand hastily reaching down for the paper stashed in her bag. “I’m so sorry…” She was uttering embarrassed. “I must have got it wrong!” She exclaimed. Pulling her bag up, so that she could dig properly, her one hand disappearing inside of it.

“It’s okay… Really.” Levy replied gently, trying to ease the woman’s worries. “I’ll help you find the place you’re looking for.”

“Thank you so much for your kindness and understanding.” Juvia responded, scrambling through the large bag. “Here… I found it.” She added, finally pulling out a crumbled piece of paper. She unraveled it quickly, letting the bag back down over her shoulder, her eyes darting over it. “This… This can’t be right…” She stated after rereading the address. She was eyeing Levy’s door, followed by the paper in her hand frantically, back and forth, out of panic. Levy raised an eyebrow, her hand reaching towards the deeply confused woman. She too was now very fascinated by whatever was happening.

“May-May I see it…?” Levy questioned, an odd chill was coming over the small girl as her hand opened, offering to take the paper. Juvia glanced up at her, taken aback, but not knowing what else she could possibly do, so she handed it over, willingly. Levy looked over it, her eyes widening at the unfamiliar handwriting, her brow stretching up out of both fear and confusion.

“Who…? Who wrote this?” Levy questioned, her eyes looking up from the paper and locking over the woman’s, a sinking feeling in her gut.

Juvia looked away for a moment, uncertainty was clouding her judgment, as she suddenly felt stuck. Gajeel had told her not to tell a soul, but she was at a dead end here and if she didn’t reply, she might not be able to get out of it. Her need to help him out of whatever this was, was driving her to make a choice, though she hadn’t any idea if it was the right one.

“Well…” Juvia started, her decision made, her voice gaining back Levy’s full attention. “Do you by chance know a man named… Gajeel?” Juvia questioned hesitantly.

The sound of his name on this woman’s lips, made Levy’s face turn pale, her eyes widening in shock.

Chapter End Notes
I've been hearing symphonies
Before all I heard was silence
A rhapsody for you and me
And every melody is timeless
Life was stringing me along
Then you came and you cut me loose
Was solo singing on my own
Now I can't find the key without you

And now your song is on repeat
And I'm dancin' on to your heartbeat
And when you're gone, I feel incomplete
So if you want the truth

I just wanna be part of your symphony
Will you hold me tight and not let go?
Symphony
Like a love song on the radio
Will you hold me tight and not let go?

I'm sorry if it's all too much
Every day you're here, I'm healing
And I was runnin' out of luck
I never thought I'd find this feeling
'Cause I've been hearing symphonies
Before all I heard was silence
A rhapsody for you and me
(A rhapsody for you and me)
And every melody is timeless

And now your song is on repeat
And I'm dancin' on to your heartbeat
And when you're gone, I feel incomplete
So if you want the truth

I just wanna be part of your symphony
Will you hold me tight and not let go?
Symphony
Like a love song on the radio
Will you hold me tight and not let go?

And now your song is on repeat
And I'm dancin' on to your heartbeat
And when you're gone, I feel incomplete
So if you want the truth

I just wanna be part of your symphony
Will you hold me tight and not let go?
Symphony
Like a love song on the radio
Symphony
Will you hold me tight and not let go?
Symphony
Like a love song on the radio
Will you hold me tight and not let go?

“Symphonies” By Clean Bandit featuring Zara Larson
Scales

Chapter Summary

Levy and Juvia have it out. Gajeel feels stuck, but then is granted freedom. Gray contemplates Juvia, but then is told he screwed up. Gajeel and Juvia meet up. Elfman seemingly comes to rescue Gray from a stressful day, only to drag him into something else. Juvia lets Gajeel have it and it makes him realize something. A certain missing troublemaker sneaks into Makarov's office.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 10: Scales

Levy was gawking at the peculiar woman who had just spoken Gajeel’s name, under the cheap lighting of her apartment foyer. The air was thick with silence, like a humidity clinging to the particles of dust that surrounded her, fogging her already skewed judgment into a more severe state of panic. The hollow awkwardness that ensued after this woman’s question, made Levy’s mind race at much the same speed as her heart. The color had all, but drained from her face, as she stood there completely immobile. There was an overall sense of dread consuming her as she swallowed dryly. Her lips were finally opening to answer, but she could not find her voice.

This wasn’t over; it couldn’t be, not now with this random woman’s appearance, but what did it mean? Levy was racking her brain for each and every conclusion she could think up; all of them seeming rather farfetched, but then again, so was the whole situation. Was this woman maybe a friend of Gajeel’s perhaps? Or could she be one of his enemies? No, if that had been the case, then why would he have sent her there, to Levy’s own apartment? None of that made any sense, unless maybe he had to do it, because someone was making him. Could that be the case? Could Gajeel maybe be in some kind of trouble, where someone was forcing his hand?

Although Levy’s mind was questioning all of these scenarios whilst in the middle of her hysterical mindset, upon better thought, she couldn’t actually foresee any of them being the answer. Simply because, why would anyone need to know who she was? She wasn’t anyone important by any means. Well, unless this woman was perhaps his girlfriend or wife…

Levy’s eyes widened at the terrifying thought, but ultimately, she found that to be an unlikely conclusion as well. For one thing, neither Gajeel nor this woman had such a ring on their finger. Plus, Levy had known Gajeel for quite some time and she couldn’t help, but feel like she would have guessed, if he actually had a person like that in his life by now. His behavior making it seem implausible, or at least she certainly hoped that was the case, as she had absolutely zero interest in being a homewrecker.
Her cheeks were reddening at the mere idea of it, mortified by the prospect. She had never imagined being involved in such a situation as this, where she was questioning the morality of her own actions. Her grandparents had raised her better than that. It was a nice reminder as to why she had always stayed away from ever doing any one-night stands in the past. Levy hated trouble and sleeping with Gajeel, hadn’t exactly been the best way of dealing with her issues, even if it had felt right at the time.

She was glancing down as she thought about this, and her night with him. It had felt right though… So right, almost justifiably so, and she hadn’t any idea why. She just couldn’t understand how it was, that she could feel so connected with someone like Gajeel. Or maybe she did know why, but either way she wasn’t willing to let herself deal with the answer just yet. Not when it was much easier to just chalk it all up to Gajeel’s womanizing ways, so that way, she couldn’t possibly become emotionally invested in a person such as him. A person whom she couldn’t be with and who didn’t want her, in the way she truly wanted to be desired.

For only a man like Gajeel could command such power over women. Influencing them with his infamous, fang-revealing grin and overly cocky attitude. Getting them to drop their panties for him, with hardly an ounce of effort on his part at all. It made Levy want to roll her eyes, just thinking about it. No wonder he had always been so damn arrogant with her! Hell, she kind of hated that even she herself had finally fallen victim to his devious ways and so maybe it was possible… That this woman had too, at some point?

Levy was glancing back up at the woman before her now, with renewed insight and a certain vying look in her eye. Perhaps she was another lover of his? That conclusion wasn’t such an unrealistic one where Gajeel was concerned, but for whatever reason it didn’t sit right with Levy, but maybe that was just, because she didn’t want it too.

She could sense her already tense body, stiffening as if something was boiling over inside. Even if it was true, and Gajeel had gotten this woman to strip for him, Levy imagined she herself was probably the only one who had ever gotten him to shed his clothing for her. She was taking a certain competitive pride in that thought, even though she knew it to be out of context when she had first made that demand of him, due to his stitches. So, in all reality it was kind of like cheating, but she didn’t care, as it was at least one way for her to bandage, her already bleeding out and dying pride.

Levy’s eyebrows were easing, as these thoughts ran rapid through her head; driving her to the near edge of insanity. It really was all just too much and the more she dwelled on it, the more nauseated she was becoming. In the end she really hadn’t any idea who this woman was or why she was there, but what she did know was that, she was deeply shaken by her appearance. Everything that had happened between her and Gajeel that night, was supposed to have been a secret. People weren’t supposed to know about her involvement with him or the incident at the club, at all. So, if that were the case, then why in the world would Gajeel have sent this stranger to her apartment?!

It was most definitely unsettling and Levy wasn’t really sure what she should do about it. She wondered if Gajeel was expecting her to somehow know, the solution. Maybe she was just supposed to put all of her trust into him again, like she had the night before when they were together. Like she should have done originally, at the club when he had warned her about Thibault…

The woman was casting Levy with an eerily vacant stare, as she waited patiently for her to respond. Levy’s eyes darted down towards the floor, her mouth still agape as she decided on what the best course of action would be. Okay… She was thinking. I’m going to trust you again, Gajeel… Her eyes closed for a few seconds as she breathed out and then she reopened them. Don’t make me regret it…
Levy’s sights bounced back up to the woman’s face, her eyes narrowing as she had finally made up her mind. *Speak… But don’t tell… Somewhere you can’t be heard by anyone… Just in case.* A voice in her head was echoing as if she somehow knew that was what Gajeel would have wanted her to do.

“Can-Can you come inside with me?” Levy questioned with a slight gesture towards her door. She was unable to hide how rattled she was. The trembling of her voice was giving her away, but she did her best to play it off, as if she was perfectly fine.

Juvia’s eyes were perking up at this, as she looked over Levy again. So, she had been in the right place after all, then. She hadn’t thought it was possible, but she could tell from the girl’s startled reaction, that she did indeed know who Gajeel was. Although her sudden fearful demeanor after hearing his name didn’t exactly bode well, because Juvia could only wonder what this poor girl had seen him do.

Gajeel wasn’t exactly a bunny rabbit; he was a downright scary human being, capable of true brutality, but only to those who truly deserved it. Juvia could only wonder if this girl was perhaps the significant other of someone Gajeel had threatened or beaten up for business related reasons. She expected to meet the real person whom she was there to see, on the other side of that door. Her mind was still imagining an intimidating figure that resembled some kind of cliché looking gangster.

Juvia nodded gravely at the girl, her own worries coming forth as Levy’s eyes went downcast. Juvia watched as Levy stuffed the paper she had given her with the address, under her arm, along with the other items she had been holding. Then she slowly and shakily approached the door in silence, with her key out.

Juvia was stepping up from behind her, as Levy was jamming the key into its lock, beginning her wild struggle to open the door with it. It appeared to be stuck as Levy rattled the knob violently, both hands over it, her small body waving with the movements until finally there was a loud click. Her battle a success, as the door creaked open, the lock seemingly being the only thing to keep it closed.

Levy reached over to the small table beside the door, turning on the little lamp sitting on top of it. A faint light illuminated the small space before them; she stepped aside with her back against the door, holding it open for Juvia to walk past. Juvia stepped forwards into the small room, her eyes swiveling around, taking it all in with a lost and blank expression over her face.

To say it wasn’t what Juvia was expecting was an understatement. The space was so small, that it was pretty clear, that only one person could possibly live in it. Levy was closing the door behind them, as Juvia continued to pour over every detail of the girl’s apartment with newfound fascination. Her eyes scaling over all of the misplaced books and home amenities, as she tried to understand how this could possibly be the right place. That was until she noticed something, a certain set of objects catching her eye on the girl’s desk.

Juvia froze, her eyes locked over the black brass knuckles, that she knew to belong to her friend; there could be no mistaking them, they were Gajeel’s. They sat there as plain as day across the room, carelessly forgotten on the surface of a computer desk. Juvia stood there in puzzlement over spotting them so easily and all she could think to do was turn around to face the girl in question, slowly.

Levy was just turning around after having relocked the door, as Juvia’s gaze resettled over her, but this time she wasn’t just looking at Levy. She was trying to understand her. Who was this girl and what was her involvement with Gajeel? Juvia was searching over her petite frame, as if maybe she could see the explanation better that way. Then Levy’s eyes matched her own, having caught Juvia’s
seeking stare over her. They stood there, face to face for a few seconds, both caught in the thickness of silence, trying to comprehend the other. Then finally Levy spoke, breaking the quiet tension between them.

“I apologize for the mess…” She started, walking forwards, her head going down awkwardly as she passed by Juvia. “I… I wasn’t expecting company…” Juvia turned as her gaze followed the girl’s bounding, yet damp blue hair around the room. Levy set the waitressing book, apron and paper Juvia had handed her down on the counter of her small kitchen, as she passed by them. She was putting her keys in the pocket of her coat and taking it off cautiously, revealing a cute orange uniform underneath. Then she gently hung it up on a set of hooks, before moving on.

She was walking fast, visibly pacing as she made her way towards the center of the room, before stopping. She turned her sights back up to Juvia. Her cheeks were a slight shade of pink from something like embarrassment or uncertainty, Juvia wasn’t sure.

“This- This is where I live…” She was saying with slight gesture of her hand, her large eyes looking glossy as she kept them on Juvia’s face. She was most definitely nervous, that much Juvia could tell. “You- You could take a seat if you’d like… Or I can take your coat if you want…!” She added, in a weak attempt to be polite, despite her worry. Her hand was settling over the back of a computer chair near where she was standing as she offered it to Juvia timidly. This clearly being the only real option other than the floor, or the bed, for sitting.

“No, that is quite alright.” Juvia answered with a shake of her head. She took a few steps forwards; her hands were clasped together over her lap. Her steps were small and careful as she glanced around the room, her head moving with her eyes. Levy watched her for a moment, unmoving, her gaze falling downwards in shame. She once again felt embarrassed for the state of her living space, not only for the mess, but also just for the dump of a place, that was the building, as she knew it was obvious to anyone who looked upon it, how broke she was.

“It’s lovely…” Came the woman’s voice, making Levy’s head snap up at her with wide eyes. “You’ve done a nice job, with making the space look welcoming as a home.” The woman added, her stare landing back on Levy’s, as she had finally stopped walking and turned back to face the small girl. She gave Levy a very faint smile, her hands still clasped together over her lap. “I can see that you like to read…” The woman finished in her dreamy voice. This made Levy turn her sights back down modestly, but a small smile was gracing her lips as well.

“Yes…” She answered simply, her small hand landing over the cut on her forehead in distress. “That’s how I spend most of my free time actually.” What little I have, Levy’s mind added at the end of her own sentence, before glancing back up at the woman. Her cheeks were still flushed and her smile was nearly non-existent, but Juvia’s only brightened, her eyes closing blissfully in response.

Again, Juvia hadn’t any idea who this girl was, but she was feeling a fondness for her and why shouldn’t she? Levy hadn’t been anything, but kind to her from the very start. She was cute and humble, but again it had Juvia questioning why she was even there, meeting someone such as her. She watched as the girl’s hand fell away from her forehead. Her complexion was paling once again, as she looked over to Juvia, her expression taking on a somber appearance and that was when Juvia knew their small talk was over.

“So…” Levy began, as she locked eyes with Juvia. “Wh-Who are you?” She questioned as if afraid to ask. Juvia had been expecting this and remained perfectly calm.

“My name is Juvia, Juvia Lockser.” She answered in her serene voice, her gaze never waverering as Levy looked about ready to jump out of her skin. “And who might you be?” She asked next in return.
“My name is Levy…” She took a small breath, as she hadn’t any idea if she should be telling this woman who she was. She was going off of a pure instinctive need to trust Gajeel, as he hadn’t let her down yet, not when it had mattered at least. “Levy McGarden…” Juvia nodded, her mind repeating the name with wonder as her eyes narrowed in on the nervous girl before her and then she glanced down, stepping closer.

“Levy…” Juvia tested the name on her lips, making Levy nod at the correct annunciation of it. “So… Levy…” Juvia addressed her; her eyes going back up to the small girl’s pale face, with another step closer. “You do know Gajeel then, don’t you?” Levy quickly looked away from Juvia’s face at the mention of his name, but she did in fact nod uneasily in confirmation.

“I know him…” Her voice was light and breathless. Poor thing looked about ready to pass out, as she looked back up at Juvia. Juvia felt sorry for her and wished she could comfort her in some way, but she hadn’t any idea why Levy was so afraid. “If- If he sent you…” She started, her voice quaking.

“He did.” Juvia interjected, making Levy’s eyes widen on her. “I am here as a favor to him.” Juvia finished. She had stopped walking, as she was fairly close to Levy now, within arm’s reach.

“Then… Then are you his friend… Or something more?” Levy questioned, her voice was hoarse with worry as she asked this, but it made Juvia nearly laugh. Her hand came up, settling over her chest.

“Gajeel is my oldest and dearest friend… But he is just that… My friend.” Juvia stated softly with a weak smile, her hand dropping.

Her oldest friend…? That was surprising to say the least; Levy hadn’t ever imagined Gajeel having someone so seemingly kind in his life and Juvia had supposedly known him for a long time? It had her wondering how long they had known each other, a sudden interest for more information about Gajeel’s past being born with it, but she pushed that desire aside for now. She couldn’t help, but notice how pretty Juvia was as well. That part, making her wonder if she should really buy that they were really, only friends. Regardless though, Levy could feel some slight relief fueling her at the woman’s words, but her deepest worry wasn’t yet gone. There was still so much nagging at her.

“What about you?” Juvia asked, breaking Levy from her train of thought over the subject. “Are you Gajeel’s friend, as well?” Juvia asked, catching Levy’s wide, doe-like stare.

“I…. Levy began, her cheeks once again going visibly red, as she glanced down modestly. What a loaded question that was? Levy wasn’t even sure how to answer it. Was she Gajeel’s friend? Up until last night, she would have denied any and all ties with him outright, but now? Now, it seemed like they were well past the point of friendship, skipping right over it almost entirely, only to wind up with something much more complex and uncertain.

Despite this, Levy knew she did indeed care for him, well somewhat at least… She was still thinking him to be a jerk, after he had ditched her that morning, but she was also painfully aware that they weren’t ever going to be together anyways. So, it hadn’t really mattered in the grand scheme of things. Right now, all they really were, was nothing more than lovers… Not even that really, seeing as it had just been a one nightstand. She honestly didn’t know what to label them as; they weren’t anything from a logical standpoint.

“It’s… I’m….” Levy began, coming up with no proper answer to the question at hand. “It’s… Difficult, to explain.” She finally managed to choke out through a breath, as she matched eyes with the woman across from her again. Her cheeks were visibly red and her eyes shameful, but it earned her a weak smile from Juvia, despite her vague response.
Levy had piqued Juvia’s interest once again, with that reply. Both women paused for nearly a full minute, while Juvia contemplated the meaning behind the smaller girl’s unsure words. The conclusion was starting to take form, when Levy finally continued with their conversation. Levy’s own thoughts now properly back in order, for her to think straight and raise her own questions once more.

“So you say, Gajeel sent you here…?”

“Correct.” Juvia reiterated.

“Then can you tell me how he is?” Levy questioned, without missing a beat, her stare was earnest and so racked with worry that Juvia took her in, with a pause of her own now. “You-You saw him right? With his leg…” Levy continued, as Juvia hadn’t answered her.

Levy’s face was going white again, as she questioned the other woman a bit more frantically. Her words were making Juvia’s eyes widen, as she hadn’t any idea what Levy was referring to.

“I did see him… But…” Juvia continued taking in Levy’s expression. Levy’s eyes had grown considerably in size, as she waited for Juvia’s reply. It was clear that whatever Juvia uttered next, about Gajeel’s well-being, was going to mean everything to this girl, just from the sheer look of desperate concern over her face. Maybe I shouldn’t mention the part about him being arrested then… Juvia thought, her mind thinking better of it. “I’m not sure what you mean… What about his leg?” Juvia finally finished with a question of her own, wanting to understand, as her eyes narrowed with confusion.

Levy was looking at Juvia with wild bewilderment etched over her features, how was it, that she didn’t know about his wound?

“He-He was hurt…!” Levy exclaimed. “Last night…” She added trying to remain calm despite how her heart was pounding. “He was stabbed in the thigh!” Levy watched as Juvia’s mouth fell open at the words.

Okay… so clearly Juvia hadn’t known that Gajeel was hurt, that much was obvious from her reaction, upon hearing the news. It was really the only time Levy had seen the woman look truly surprised by something, since meeting her. Although Levy couldn’t understand how this information would have slipped through the cracks, if she had actually seen Gajeel. Regardless of that, it was clear from the look of shock over Juvia’s face, that she was indeed worried about her friend.

“How did that happen?!” Juvia questioned, her voice now fueled with urgency, as she demanded answers.

Levy’s eyes fell down and away from Juvia’s face, guilt was consuming her as she thought back to everything that had happened. She didn’t know if she should even be telling this woman anything about it, if she hadn’t already known.

“It was my fault…” She answered softly, refusing to match eyes with Juvia. “He saved me…” She added finally glancing up. “I’m not sure… If I should say much else…” Levy spoke; her vision was brimming with tears, but they weren’t spilling.

Juvia’s own eyes were now large ovules, as she searched over Levy’s pretty face for a third time, since meeting her. Taking in the ugly cut over her head once more, her stare narrowing over it in comprehension this time. Things were finally starting to fall into place, the answer becoming apparent, even though she hadn’t been asking the right questions. No… Not the wrong questions, just the wrong person… Came Juvia’s inner voice, as her gaze continued to revolve around the
worried expression over Levy’s face. This girl… She cares for Gajeel… That much Juvia was certain of, although their relationship seemed unclear. Juvia had her suspicions based on the circumstances and she was pretty sure she was dead on with her assumption, but only time would tell or perhaps Gajeel would.

“There’s no need then… I understand.” Came Juvia’s voice soothingly, earning Levy’s surprise. Juvia waited until the girl was looking back up at her. “I didn’t know that he was hurt… But he seems to be in fair health, despite the injury…” She added trying her best to ease the girl’s fears.

She watched as Levy took a reliving breath, although she was still a bit shaken, the color was at least returning to her youthful face. It had been the exact reaction Juvia was expecting, based on everything she was discovering about the two people in question and their mysterious ‘relationship’. The injury, the news of Gajeel’s leg and the fact that she was claiming to have been saved by him, it was all becoming glaringly obvious, what was really going on here.

Juvia kept her eyes planted over Levy’s face, as she remembered the existence of the retrieved cell phone, still waiting inside of her bag. That, and all of the efforts Gajeel had gone through to get it back from police custody, while being injured no less. This girl… Juvia’s thoughts spoke. Gajeel is protecting her… It had all, become clear and that was when Juvia knew, Levy must have been someone worth protecting, at least in her friend’s eyes.

“Tell me…” Juvia began, as she started to reach into her bag upon finishing the thought. Her hand was digging through the contents, as Levy’s eyes were drawn over to it and then finally she pulled something out. “Does this belong to you?” Juvia asked offering her the object with new understanding. Levy’s eyes were wide as she shakily reached for the item in Juvia’s hand, with great confusion.

“That-That’s my phone!” She uttered, it was just as Juvia had figured. She watched as Levy took it in her hands, searching over it as if to be sure. “But…! But how?! Why?!?” She was questioning clearly alarmed, as Juvia reached a hand towards the girl. Her white fingers gracing Levy’s shoulder in a comforting gesture as she smiled at the girl, who was now matching eyes with her.

“That was why he sent me here…” Juvia explained. Her voice was soft and full of comfort. “He wanted me to return that to you…” Her gaze hardened a bit, her smile weakening as she took on a more serious demeanor. “He went through a lot to get it back for you…”

“Is that why he isn’t here…?” Levy asked timidly, as Juvia took her hand back.

“Yes, of course…” Juvia replied. “And I can promise you, I will keep my eye on him.” She added, as if to try and ease Levy further. Levy felt grateful to this woman upon hearing these words.

“Oh… Wait… There’s something else…” Levy began turning away. She was stepping away from Juvia, her body heading towards the desk. Juvia watched as Levy’s hand settled over the brass knuckles. The girl paused as if thinking, better of her actions, once again questioning, if she should hand them over to Juvia.
“Those are Gajeel’s…” Juvia stated, squashing Levy’s doubt. “He mentioned leaving them here…” Juvia added. “He asked me to bring them back.” This made Levy finally gather them up and step back towards the woman. She handed them over to Juvia timidly.

“Yes… I can’t imagine he wants me to have them…” Levy answered as she watched Juvia put them in her bag. No, I can’t either… But then… Why…? Why leave them here Gajeel…? Juvia’s eyes were narrowing at the question, she was currently posing in her head. Unless he didn’t mean too, her thoughts spoke and it left her to wonder. That assumption made a lot more sense than anything else she could think up. She turned back towards Levy.

“Well, I best be going…” Juvia spoke. She was suddenly anxious to get some answers from the aforementioned man, rather than bother the seemingly innocent girl, any more than she already had. “I did, as requested.” Levy nodded in understanding, as Juvia began to turn. “Thank you for your kindness, Levy…” Juvia spoke.

Levy watched Juvia’s back, as she retreated towards the door, following closely, in step behind her. She couldn’t help but feel like, she should be the one thanking Juvia instead of vise-versa, as Juvia had greatly eased her mind. Even if that hadn’t been her initial intention upon showing up at Levy’s door. The relief was washing over the small girl like cold water; she hadn’t even realized how badly she needed to hear about Gajeel until after she had. Maybe now, she would actually be able to function properly, as she no longer needed to be sick with worry over him.

“No… Thank you…” Levy spoke, as she opened the door. Juvia turned back towards Levy as she stood in the open frame. “I can rest easier now, thanks to you…” Levy spoke, meeting Juvia’s eye with a sincere glance. Juvia nodded at the girl slowly in understanding, before she started to turn away, but then she paused. For some reason she felt the need to say something more, just as Levy was starting to close the door. Levy just managed to catch the needful look in Juvia’s cobalt eyes and had hesitated mid-swing as she noticed Juvia was about to speak to her one last time.

“Levy McGarden…?”

“Yes…?” Levy questioned, startled by the formality of hearing her full name. The way Juvia spoke was like a graceful melody, poised yet meaningful.

“Gajeel…” Juvia began, glancing down. “Though he can be crude and intimidating…” Juvia locked eyes with the girl once more, as she continued, “He is not the monster he portrays himself out to be…” She paused, before continuing timidly. “And… Nothing he does is without meaning… It is… The only way he knows how to live… He will only ever act for those who are dearest to him.” Juvia’s words were sincere and soft; her hand was hovering just over her heart, as she said them. Her voice was as unwavering, as ever. “It is in this way, that I know, I can trust you… Because it is clear to me, that he does.” She finished.

Levy stood there for a moment, heeding to Juvia’s speech with mouth agape in slight confusion. She hadn’t any idea why Juvia felt the need to say such things to her, but she was quickly recognizing, that she felt very much the same.

She held to Juvia’s serene, yet intense stare. The contradiction of those eyes, were moving her in such an unfathomable way and yet Levy found comfort in them. The seemingly detached demeanor upon meeting Juvia, had just been a façade upon closer inspection. For Levy could now see, all of the warmth and kindness amongst a glow of deep blue; mirroring her very same feelings about Gajeel back at her, like a reflection in a puddle of rainwater. A small knowing smile was appearing over her lips. One, that she could not, for the life of her, fend off.

“I understand… And I think… I agree with you…” Levy spoke, making Juvia return the smile. Both
women having reached a very earnest understanding of not only each other, but of the man, for whom they spoke of and the individual roles that they both played in his life. Then finally, Juvia began to turn away from Levy and make her way towards the door, out of the complex. Levy watched as the woman’s back disappeared, there were no more words shared between them and there didn’t need to be.

Levy finally turned away, closing the door to her room behind her, after Juvia was gone. She gently leaned her back against it; the phone was now tightly wrapped in both of her hands, as she pressed it up against her beating chest.

Gajeel… She spoke his name internally, her body practically trembling with the deep amount of relief, that was still spreading over her. *I am so glad that you are okay…* Her mind added as her head fell back, an exhausted breath was sliding out from her throat. Now, since the first time she had discovered him gone, Levy felt like she could actually breathe properly. She slowly let her body slide down the wood, until she was sitting on the floor, her back still against the door. She was holding a death grip around the small object still clutched tightly in her tiny hands. She had it pressed up against her chest, right over her fluttering heart.

Gajeel was still waiting in the same blank interrogation room, his sights aimed downwards, over the age torn skin of his right forearm. His expression was distant and forlorn as he sat there, a victim of memory. He was trying his best to not let his mind wonder back to a past event, that he had no interest in recollecting. His worries over the current situation with Levy, easily powering the locomotive that was his train of thought, down the tracks of history, despite his reluctance. She could very well be in that same severe danger and there wasn’t anything he could do about it.

Gajeel’s body was tensing, his fist squeezing shut as his vision continued to trail over the spiraling scars of his right arm, with a narrowed and disturbed look in his eye. His perception of time was nonexistent as he sat there, letting guilt eat away at his gut, like a worm chewing at the insides of an apple. His faith in the rain woman may have been the only thing keeping him sane, as he needed to believe that she had succeeded in getting Totomaru, to hand over Levy’s phone. The alternative being far too terrifying for him to bear, as a hideous image involving Levy in an all too familiar position, reaped its way across his brain before he could even stop it.

Gajeel’s eyelids slammed shut, his other hand bracing around the scars that littered his right arm tightly. He didn’t want to entertain the thought, of Levy ending up in such a horrid place. His eyes were stinging dry, the acids of his stomach bubbling over, at even the vague idea of such an act being put to fruition. The bile was sloshing around in the back of his throat, making him want expel the contents of his gut, right then and there, in the empty room.

No… Calm down… His hand had come up and off of his arm, only to slap over his mouth, in a desperate attempt to hold it in and prevent any retching. *That won’t happen… I won’t fuckin let it…* Came his outraged thoughts, made furious by the fact that he had even considered it might. His hand lowered away from his mouth as he panted for a moment, his red eyes were wide as he stared down at the scars once more. Not ever… Came his thoughts, he was calming considerably as he resettled his other hand back over them gently. His eyelids were falling shut as he let out a soothing breath from deep within his chest.

Sitting idly back, while waiting for someone else to take care of shit, had never really been Gajeel’s first choice on how to handle a situation. He was a man of action, not patience and so the waiting
around was driving him to his wits end. Being powerless was something he had sworn to never be again. Not after everything he had been forced to endure, to get to where he was now. True pain, beyond that of normal human recognition, Gajeel had all, but conquered it, or so he believed that he had, at least. That one significant victory in his life, marking the end of him ever being controlled again and yet somehow, here he was.

His choices had brought him to this point, to a position of helplessness anyways and it made him wonder. What was it that he had missed? There must have been something, because he was completely stuck and he hated every second of it.

It made him feel like a damn kid again and it was with that realization that an all too familiar, toothy grin flashed its way across Gajeel’s memory. One he hated seeing, but often used for self-motivation, every time he needed to figure things out.

Gajeel’s lips were lowering into a scowl, at the age-withered image of a face; he could hardly picture correctly anymore, with piercings lining it, in much the same fashion as his own. The only other recognizable feature being two, metallic silver, slit-like eyes, just like Gajeel’s own red ones. His brow was creasing heavily in frustration, at the sheer mockery of its appearance in his head.

Are ya laughin’ at me again, old man? Came Gajeel’s questioning thoughts to the lost, taunting face of his past.

Yea… Well why wouldn’t ya be? He questioned next, as he could recognize the sound of an infuriating voice, echoing against the walls of his subconscious. One, that was not unlike Gajeel’s own but was more pronounced and less icy. He heard it all of the damn time; always lecturing him, as if he were still the same reckless adolescent he had once been, all of those many years ago.

“Ya still don’t get it, do you…?” The voice was scolding. “Damn…” It added in a seething breath. “You’re such a hard-headed kid…” It continued and Gajeel could just make out the belittling amusement in its tone.

Gajeel’s eyes were still closed, as the owner of the voice began to change form, from just being that of a mere face. It had now become part of a lean silhouetted figure, back lighted against the white glow of an open doorway.

Yea… And yer still such an ass… Gajeel’s thoughts persisted in response to the cold voice and smirking face. His mind noting the figure of memory, to be far taller than he himself, overshadowing him in such a way, that nobody else in his life ever had or ever would again. This particular image of that man, forever inking its way into his being, like a fading tattoo on the other side of his skin. It was the last time he had ever seen that man and he hated him. Gajeel hated that man to a degree that nobody else in his life could ever hope to beat.

Gajeel’s eyes opened, his mind now completely calm, allowing all of his rational thoughts to take priority once more. The spiteful memories of a certain older delinquent, serving their purpose as they always did, in his hour of need. His focus and reason were taking over, where desperation and panic had just been plaguing him, not even minutes prior.

The rain woman has yet to return and that is most likely a good sign… Gajeel reminded himself. Even so… Even if my plan somehow didn’t work… And Juvia did fail… There won’t be anythin’ I can do bout it, until she gets me the hell outta here… Gajeel surmised, before his mind continued, but at least that much I KNOW she can do.

Came the last of his thoughts, when he was interrupted by the sound of the door opening. Gajeel quickly glanced up, to see an officer in basic uniform staring him down with a disinterested expression over his face. His hand was still settled over the doorknob, hanging part ways into the room, as if he was only half invested in what he was actually doing.
“Mr Redfox?” The mid-aged officer with graying hair questioned, his tone was even and unchanging.

“Uh… Yea?” Gajeel answered with uncertainty, as he wondered if they were only coming in, to finally move him into a holding cell. Not that Gajeel cared; anything was better than continuing to wait around, in that blank room. He had already been sitting in there, for more hours than he cared to count.

“You are to come with me, to go get your things.” The officer replied, his voice expressing boredom.

Gajeel’s pierced brow was pushing up in surprise at this news. Had Juvia managed to get him out already? She hadn’t even come back in the room to speak to him yet, so he hadn’t been expecting this, but he certainly wasn’t about to complain about it.

“Oi! They’re lettin’ me go?!” Gajeel questioned the officer in disbelief. He practically jumped to his feet in his excitement, but then he was wincing from the sudden weight, being dumped back over his injured leg. The officer just shrugged his shoulders in response, before turning away.

“Apparently…” He mumbled groggily. “Come with me.” He added, speaking up with a sigh, while beckoning for Gajeel to follow him from over his shoulder. Gajeel did not hesitate to do as ordered, anxious as all hell, to get out of that room.

Gray was leaning back in a chair that was not his own, at a desk that also did not belong to him. He had been waiting there for what felt like an eternity, just to receive word from either Totomaru, or the attorney woman, known as Juvia, whom he had seen Totomaru walk away with. His arms were loosely crossed over his torso, with his chin resting against his chest, as his eyes struggled to stay open. He had basically been in the station all night and all morning. His shift was already more than over, hours ago. He was only remaining there out of an obligation to see the case he had stumbled upon through, as he was not only the arresting officer, but a witness as well.

He knew he could probably go home if he wanted to, considering the paperwork had already been handled and transferred over to the proper jurisdiction. He was only staying there now, because he knew they would eventually want to question him. Gray didn’t want to bother with leaving, to then only have to wait around for a call asking him to come right back in, for interrogation. It was too inconvenient, not when he could already be there, getting it done and over with fast. He was anxious to get this crooked man off of the streets and behind bars, after witnessing the way he had been attacking his fellow officer. Gray wasn’t overly concerned with justice or anything; he just wanted to protect people. That, among other more personal reasons, had been his whole goal when he had decided to become a cop.

His heavy downward gaze was settling over the edge of the desk in front of him. His eyelids were still struggling to stay open, as he thought about this. This Gajeel Redfox man seemed like a dangerous person. Why even just his name was sending red flags, as Gray was sure he had heard it before. He just didn’t know where, but he couldn’t imagine it being from a good source, most likely a gang or something of that nature. That had been part of the reason why Gray was so willing to go the extra mile to make sure Gajeel was put away. He wanted him locked away somewhere, where he knew he couldn’t cause anyone, any more harm.

Gray’s eyelids finally fell shut, his thoughts slurring into oblivion. Now there were only shapes and
colors, pitted up against the black void that was his mind; a particular array of blues, gleaming through the haze of his no longer, lucid state. They twisted into what looked like a drop of water, that splash landed, into that of a halo shape, brimming with a deep cobalt hue.

Gray’s eyes cracked back open in confusion, that woman’s obscure stare, was clouding his subconscious as he nearly drifted off to sleep. Her entire face was now coming to mind, as he remembered her pale skin and stoic expression once more.

Juvia… Gray’s thoughts echoed her name, just out of pure reverence for its beauty, like before when he had first heard it. He didn’t know how he felt about her, but he knew he liked the melodic sound of her name. Though it would be wrong to say that he hadn’t found her pretty. She certainly was, that much was obvious to anyone who laid eyes upon her, but Gray had also found her to be very peculiar.

It had been the inconsistency of her personality, throughout their exchange that had troubled him most about her. It had almost been like, she was switching between different roles. At first, coming across as a very impassive and challenging individual, before doing a one eighty and then becoming an overly kind and polite person towards him. She had been a little all over the place and now he really hadn’t any idea, what her real personally was like. It made him wonder if it had all just been an act, to deter his judgment of her. Like maybe, it was some kind of strange attorney trap, used to appease all of the different types of people they would have to make negotiations with.

Gray had been warned about the manipulations of legal advisors. They were supposed to be cunningly clever and perceptive, when it came to siding against police officers, so that was what he had been prepared for, when Juvia first came waltzing in. She had indeed lived up to that reputation in those first few moments, appearing so calm and self-assured. She had been downright graceful in both speech and movement, and it had actually been quite attractive, thus pleasing Gray, to come across a woman such as that. As a rookie, he had been more than willing to contend with a bold and seemingly worthy opponent such as her, just to prove his worth as a cop, but then came the stumble.

Once Gray had answered that loaded bluff of hers, Juvia had become blatantly clumsy and almost cute with her sudden apologetic nature towards him. The whole thing had been so confusing! She was confusing! What the hell was he supposed to make of her, after that?

Gray was shaking his head at the recollection of her, with a large scowl on his face, his eyes rolling. He really hadn’t any clue what had gotten into that woman, but there had been one other noteworthy thing about her, that he could not forget, despite everything else. The intense stare he had seen her wielding, never once changed. In fact, it may have been the only thing that remained consistent within Gray’s short time of his knowing her. And for some reason, its presence resonated deep within him, calling from a place of forfeit and solitude that he knew all too well himself.

The magnitude of this emanating emotion from Juvia, had been very powerful. Strong enough for Gray to even envision her dejected glare, right as he had just been trying to drift off to sleep. And that bothered him, because he could swear he sensed some kind of great significance in that look and all that she was hiding in it. Her eyes were so wide open and yet completely closed off; in an impossible to read type of way and they whispered of secrets to him. There were answers in that woman, he was sure of it. Answers to questions that he knew he had, even if he had yet to think of them all and they beckoned for resolution.

Gray wasn’t sure why he suspected this as firmly as he did, other than the fact that he couldn’t blindly believe that Juvia, was somehow tied to Gajeel without question. Gajeel was a very suspicious character; befittingly so, whereas Juvia didn’t meet the expectations of what someone in her line of work would be like, when aligned with someone such as him. If anything, she was on a
whole different plane from Gajeel entirely, or at least she damn well should have been, based on societies standards. Gray full heartedly believed this as well, both by looking and speaking to her. That bringing him to another possible conclusion, that there very well could be someone else involved, with these two. Perhaps a group, with someone of higher power, pulling the strings, but unfortunately Gray had no substantial evidence to back any of these suspicions of his.

Despite having no real proof, Gray did however have some cause to believe that not all of his intuitions were completely wrong. For one thing, he knew Gajeel hadn’t been the one to call Juvia to the station, as he hadn’t allowed for him to make his one phone call just then, before she had shown up. That really hadn’t made any sense. How was it, Juvia had known to be there? Secondly, what had been the deal with her asking to speak with Totomaru, the assaulted officer and the victim of their case? Gray hadn’t been an officer long, but that had seemed like a rather abnormal request. And lastly, perhaps most importantly, where was she now?

Gray could only gather that Juvia had actually left the station at this point, as she had been gone for far too long, which he didn’t understand that either. Wasn’t she supposed to be trying to get her client out of lock up? Nothing was adding up and it was keeping Gray from finding sleep, as Juvia’s mysterious stare kept haunting his vision, every time he so much as closed his eyes.

That was until he heard the sound of footsteps, ripping his attention away from his exhausted thoughts and to the nearby surroundings instead. Gray’s eyes widened as he spotted Gajeel coming from around the corner, following another officer that Gray hadn’t ever met before. They were headed out in the direction of the front of the station, which could only mean one thing.

Gray was on his feet in an instant; his chair shooting out from underneath him, as all signs of sleepiness had quickly vanished, just as fast. His mouth was dropping open as Gajeel shot him an arrogant smirk. Gray was pointing at Gajeel in confusion, his display of evident shock successfully managing to gain the other officer’s attention. The gray-haired man hesitated, with Gajeel in toe, once the two of them were in the vicinity of where Gray was standing in utter and visible distress, at seeing them.

“H- Hey!” Was all Gray could get out at first. The other officer was greeting Gray with a furrowed brow, an unimpressed expression. Meanwhile Gajeel just stood there behind him, a whole head higher, trading his smirk for a scowl instead. “Where the hell is he going?!” Gray finally managed to gasp out in question.

“He is being released.” Came the other officer’s, tired response.

“Ah, hell no!” Gray raged back, his shock now being replaced with anger, as his finger then shifted back in the direction, the two of them had come from. “Take him to holding! There’s no way we’re releasing him just yet!” Gray ordered fiercely. His hands were going back to his sides, with palms up and open in outrage. “His attorney isn’t even here!”

The officer shot Gray a fatigued frown in response, his baggy looking eyes, only serving to further his overall fed up and unhappy appearance. He really didn’t appear to give a shit about what Gray had to say, nor anyone for that matter. He was a man of abandoned pride, who just accepted life’s woes quietly and complacently in order to get by, even if it made him a miserable human being in the process.

“These are my orders.” Came his rehearsed reply, his tone nearly as emotionless as Juvia’s voice had been initially. Gray’s hand was squeezing into a tight fist, as his anger got the best of him.

“No, that can’t be!” He spoke between clenched teeth. “I’ve been sitting here this whole time! Not a damn thing has happened!” The volume of his voice was rising again. “There’s just no way! They
haven’t even questioned me yet!” The other officer looked about ready to say something else in response to Gray’s outburst. His mouth was open, but his voice was drowned out when another person spoke up instead.

“Doesn’t matter.”

Gray whipped around for the second time that day, to once again meet the stern expression of none other than the assaulted officer himself. Totomaru had a large frown creasing his face and his eyes were looking nearly as worn down and tired, as Gray’s own.

“What the hell are you talking about Totomaru?!” Gray questioned, his finger pointing at Gajeel again, as he kept his gaze locked over Totomaru’s sour face. “I saw what he did to you! I’m a witness! They HAVE to question me!” Gray demanded.

The listless officer leading Gajeel, took that opportunity while Gray’s back was turned, to beckon Gajeel forward once more. Clearly lacking any and all interest in whatever it was, that his other two fellow officers were arguing over, even if it did involve the man, who was following just behind him. Gray turned back around to watch the two of them go, his body straightening up out of frustration, as he saw Gajeel’s laughing red eyes hang over him in victory.

“Listen kid… Have you ever heard of a technicality?” Came Totomaru’s voice in Gray’s ears. Gray shifted his stare back to the more experienced officer, who was eyeing him with impatience.

“Well… Sure, but-”

“Well congratulations! This is your first time running into one then!” Totomaru exclaimed in mock enthusiasm, as he stepped forwards. He then dropped a file down on the desk Gray was standing by; it was actually Totomaru’s own desk. “Now get used to it, because it happens all of the time…” He quickly added with a low voice, as his face neared Grays, before straightening back up and folding his arms. “Your case has been overturned, as you weren’t technically considered to be on active duty when making the arrest.” Gray was shaking his head in confusion at this, his brow pushing together as his stomach clenched.

“Wait what…? How can that be? No, that’s not right!”

“Look…” Totomaru began, resting a hand on Gray’s shoulder, as he held his stare intensely. “I get it… And I appreciate you looking out for me. Really… I do… But there isn’t anything you… or I, for that matter… Can do about this.” He stated, his tone serious. “In fact, it’s better if we just all, let this get swept under the rug. Trust me…” His brow was outstretched, as his voice quieted some more. “Because then, at least that way, it can’t come back to bite you in the future… Just in case, something else did go wrong… Get what I mean?” Totomaru finished with a question. Gray’s eyes shifted down, his lack of experience making him feel like a damn fool.

“Yea… I get it.” He answered coolly, trying to ease his stress levels back to normal, but it had been a fucking crazy day and he had, had it. Totomaru straightened back up and patted Gray once on the shoulder.

“Yea… There ya go… Now cheer up rookie, things will get better.” He replied taking his hand back. “Now go home and get some rest, will ya?” Totomaru chimed as he turned away from Gray. “Ya look beat.” He added as he began to walk away, leaving Gray to stare at the ground. His head was a mass of weary misunderstandings, as he tried to recall each and every law he had ever learned, just so he could understand where exactly he had gone wrong.

Totomaru had completely vanished once again, leaving Gray to gaze at his own feet as his eyes
narrowed in discomfort. He couldn’t figure it out. He couldn’t understand where and when, he had done something wrong, and how the case would have been considered a technicality. His dark eyes moved back up some, landing on the surface of the desk he was standing near. Finally settling over the case file Totomaru had just left there, to examine later.

Wait… Gray’s mind was speaking, as a thought occurred to him. His head snapped up and he began to book it forwards, through the station. Out the way he had seen Gajeel and the other officer go. He nearly ran into that same, tired old officer, on his way back, after he had released Gajeel. He continued on past him without stopping, leaving a path of wind in his wake. Heads were turning up, as they watched him jog past them and out towards the doors of the station, with great haste.

Gajeel was standing before the station he had just walked out of, holding his still dead phone with irritation. His red eyes glanced around, it was nearing evening at this point and the streets were a lot less crowded then they had been earlier. The sky was tinting into a warm purplish hue. The rain was gone, but Gajeel could still smell it in the air. The sidewalks were mostly dry now, as it hadn’t come down too hard. His head looked up towards the sky, his brow lowering against the light of the sun, or what was left of it at least.

His brain was working fast; he needed to get to a phone and quickly, because he needed to reach Juvia right away, in order to find out what was going on. The only other alternative being, to try and speak with Totomaru again, and that was just out of the question, after what had happened earlier. He didn’t need another incident like the last, playing out, just so he could wind up right back in police custody. Sitting in a jail cell or worse, the blank interrogation room once again.

It was just as Gajeel was pondering his options, when a yellow cab pulled up to the curve right in front of where he was standing. The back window of the car was already scrolling down to reveal, the very woman he had just been seeking. Juvia looked up to Gajeel, with her all too knowing stare and a small befitting smile over her lips. She looked pleased to see him and Gajeel couldn’t help but return her smile, with a weak one of his own.

Relief was fueling him, bringing with it, a certain coolness that he desperately needed in his deeply frustrated state. It circulated through his body like a crisp breeze over one’s heated skin in the dead of winter. Thus, laying claim to Gajeel’s hostile temperament and twisting it to near joy. He didn’t think he had ever been so happy to see her before, not in his whole entire life. He also somehow knew, that she had managed to succeed in the task he had given her, just from the confident expression adorned over her face.

“Oh, so they let you go already? Well we must thank Totomaru for a job well done then, mustn’t we?” Juvia started. Her voice was light, as she spoke to him from her spot inside the car. Gajeel’s tiny smile was spreading, to that of a lopsided smirk.

“You do what ya want rain woman… Seein as he did your job for ya and all, but there ain’t no way in hell I’m thanking that bastard for anythin’.” Gajeel replied, as he closed his eyes and folded his arms. His head was looking up and off to the side, before he continued. “I mean shit! The whole damn thing could have been avoided, if he had just done what I asked of him, in the first damn place! Nah, I think I’m pretty bent on blamin’ that idiot, fer the whole damn thing.” Gajeel’s eyes opened. His smirk had all but disappeared, as he looked over Juvia’s still smiling face. “Aw well… Doesn’t matter now, I suppose… I know who my real friends are…” He finished with a clear tone of finality in his voice.
Gajeel’s hard gaze had settled over Juvia, as he said this, she had closed her eyes in response to his words and then she waited, taking her time, as she pondered. After all, Juvia was forever calm and calculating in all of her mannerisms and Gajeel had always respected that trait about her. Her smile was now fading, as her eyelids opened again. That all too familiar, seeking stare of hers, was now gracing him with resolve as she searched over his whole entire form, with conjecture. Then finally she paused, her eyes settling over the blood on his pants, just as he had figured.

She had confirmed what it was, that she had been checking for, but she made no comment about it otherwise. Instead, she just bounced her eyes back up to his face with a narrowed stare, her brow arching in question, but Gajeel knew she wasn’t about to ask what it was, that she was thinking, out loud. Not yet at least, not until they were in a more secured setting, preferably not outside the police station.

“Yes… And as your real friend, we need to talk.” She ordered. Her voice was tranquil as always, but it wielded a hidden firmness to it. One, that Gajeel knew to mean, there would be no debating about it. She wasn’t asking him, she was demanding that he tell her everything, even if it was in the nicest way possible.

Gajeel met Juvia’s insistence with an equally calm acceptance. He had actually been expecting this request from her and it was certainly, just deserved. Especially after everything he had just asked of her, putting her at risk, by getting her involved in his own illegal activities.

Juvia was a kind person, despite the world’s injustices towards her in youth. She was unlike Gajeel in this way, as he had always taken a certain pleasure in biting back the cruel fingers of fate, for its strangled hold over them. Juvia held no such desire for power, nor had she ever wanted to hurt anyone, in the name of revenge. All she had ever really wanted, was to be accepted, but she was also a very prudeful woman. This virtue of hers, making her willfully aware of the obligations she owed to certain people, and she used these reasons as her motivations to serve. But it was these same aspects of her personality, that also made her ill-suited to fill a role such as Gajeel’s, in Jose’s business. Working with criminals, beating up thugs and making illegal dealings; Juvia was not cut out for such deeds, she was far too noble.

She did however, deserve to do an occupation as equally lucrative for Jose, but it needed to be something safe and legitimate. Gajeel had always been satisfied with the idea of Juvia becoming Jose’s business attorney. It had been the right move for her, as this way, she could stay out of all of the dangerous wrong doings, while still fulfilling her end of the secret promise they had both made to Jose as children. That commitment being, that they would both somehow find a way to be of use to him upon age, as payment for everything he had done for them.

That had been the pact Gajeel and Juvia had made together, while growing up and they both had been steadfast in achieving their goals, but in their own individual ways. Juvia had gone to school and made use of her intelligence, whereas Gajeel had stepped up in the business aspect, taking front and center with his brute force and headlong attitude. Both of them having reached the conclusion, that the best way to help Jose, would be to work for him and keep the company afloat by any means necessary.

Gajeel had always been proud of Juvia for getting through the years of school and such, unbeknownst to her of course. He had been pleased with her much wiser choice to become the legal adviser, as he hadn’t wanted to see her wind down the same path as him, due to their shared obligations to Jose. That was also why he had never intended on dragging her into any of his illicit activities, like he had today. He would of never have done that, if he had been able to see any other way to protect Levy. Juvia was far too loyal and Gajeel had known all along, that she would burden the task he had asked of her, for him. For just as she felt the need to carry out her own obligations to
Jose, Juvia also had an ongoing debt that she felt she owed Gajeel, and it went far deeper than even that of their shared employer.

Gajeel of course knew of this, but he did not agree with it. Juvia didn’t owe him anything as far as he was concerned, but for whatever reason he couldn’t get her to understand that. Maybe it was just a rule of friendship, but Gajeel had never made it his business to really understand how such relationships truly worked, considering he had so few. Another thing he didn’t appreciate, was feeling the lost emotion of his guilt once more, just as he had started to sense it with Levy.

This time he was now reliving it, for taking advantage of Juvia’s exceeding loyalty. It wasn’t so much, that he minded owing her either, nor did he care that he needed to hand out an explanation. No, Gajeel just didn’t like the thought of using Juvia’s better qualities for his own gain. She was a far better person than him, much like Levy was and he regretted mixing good people, with his dangerous life. His line of work was only meant for the true scum of the earth, the ones crawling around the alleyways, like rats roaming the sewers.

Gajeel considered himself to be one of those rats, but again his trust for Juvia was paramount and with good reason. He knew her far too well and technically she was already forever tied in his life, just normally the lighter end of it. She was the closest thing he had to family, a sister by all accounts, but blood. There weren’t many people Gajeel sincerely trusted, let alone considered like her. The least he could do, was give her some much-deserved answers, though he really didn’t know what all Levy had told her so far, other than the fact that his leg had been stabbed of course.

Gajeel shrugged the thought off, with indifference. He really wasn’t overly concerned with Juvia knowing about that now, seeing as it wasn’t something he could hide from her anymore. Not when he would be standing around her, out in the open and walking around on it. Hell, he hadn’t even been able to change his clothes yet, so she was bound to have noticed anyways. If anything, it was probably better that she found out now, before seeing it, than to be startled upon discovering it of her own means.

He could tell she was worried about it, but she was far too sharp to show her concern outwardly, in a place of public. He knew she wouldn’t even ask until they were in a more proper setting, where they could speak with less worry of being overheard. This was just another reason on a list of many, as to why Gajeel had the upmost faith in the elegant rain woman. He closed his eyes, his smirk returning once he had opened them, his mouth growing into his usual toothy grin.

“Sure thing rain woman, as long as we can eat something… Lead the way.” He replied, earning another smile from her, as she gestured for him to get into the cab with her from the other side.

Gray had just come bursting out the front doors of the station, when he spotted Gajeel’s tall figure standing before a cab at the bottom of the stairs, near the street. His eyes widened when he spotted Juvia sitting inside, a soft smile over her features. Somehow, he had just known all along she would be there, and that Gajeel would be meeting up with her. He wasn’t at all surprised to then see, Gajeel walk around the other side of the cab and join her inside of it.

Gray stood there watching, statuesque in form. Almost like he had become a piece of architecture, decorating the front steps of the station as the car pulled away. Leaving him to wonder the significance of what he had just witnessed. Everything he had been suspecting, was now calling at his insides, like a warning. There was a siren going off in his ears. He somehow just instinctively
knew, that it all meant something. He just couldn’t quite grasp what it was yet, not when he had too little information.

These thoughts were pooling into a basin at the bottom of his skull, like a thick soup of confusion. That was until his eyes were drawn to something else familiar. His head shifted up at the sight of squad car, pulling up next to the curve, near the station.

Gray’s eyebrows shot back in surprise, as he hadn’t expected to see his partner this late in the day. Coming to retrieve him, yet there he was, nonetheless. Gray was positive it was Elfman, as he would have recognized their squad car anywhere. He immediately went bolting down the steps of the station, as fast as his legs would allow him too, without falling. He approached the car fast, his partner catching a glimpse of him through the front window shield, as Gray made his way to the right-side window of the car, that was now open. Gray hand’s slapped over it, as his head lowered so he could stare at his flaxen haired partner in bewilderment.

“Man, you really are still here… You have kept me waiting all day!” Were the first words out of Elfman’s mouth, his voice booming as always. “Get in already!”

Gray didn’t hesitate, despite his shock. He wanted to be the hell away from that station. After all of the frustrations he had, had to endure all day and night, because of it. He also had far too many questions for his partner as well, and he didn’t even know where to start. His mind was buzzing so loud, that he finally just blurted out the first one, that he was able to create with his mouth.

“Why aren’t you at home?!” Although Gray’s voice came out loud, like he was angry and yelling; his face betrayed his true emotions. He was very clearly happy, to see Elfman, a person whom he both knew and trusted whole-heartedly.

“Something came up.” Elfman answered. Gray’s eyes widened.

“Really? Me too actually!” He exclaimed a little too excited. Elfman was adjusting his mirror as he continued. His voice was calm as he spoke, in contradiction to Gray’s own, their roles normally reversed.

“Yea… The Queen herself summoned me, what about you?” Elfman posed the question at the end, causing Gray to let out a sigh, as his head hung down in defeat.

“Honestly, it was a bunch of BS.” He spat coldly. His eyes were narrowing as his head came back up, looking off and out the window in front of them. “I don’t even know if I want to get into it all, right now. I’m so pissed off…” His voice was still icy, as he said this.

Elman nodded, noting how tired Gray looked as well. He felt very much the same; normally the two of them would have gotten some sleep by now.

“I get it man… Don’t worry about it. I’ve got something I gotta talk to you about anyways. It’s why I’m here.” Elfman replied, earning Gray’s dark eyes back over him.

“Yea… About that… I was wondering how you knew where to come and find me? I haven’t even looked at my phone or anything.” Gray answered and Elfman just shrugged.

“Well I hadn’t heard from you… So, I took a shot in the dark, that you must have still been here, working on somethin, because you didn’t answer. And I didn’t think you would leave me hanging like that, all night without reason. And I also figured you would have told me, if you had already gotten a ride home from someone else… You’re a take care of business kind of man, like me. So, I know what to expect from you.” Elfman explained. “Anyways buckle up, cause we’ve got
“We do?” Gray asked, as he did what was demanded of him. His mind was still swirling with wonder over all of Elfman’s explanations. “What the heck is it, now?” Gray asked, his head going back with a groan, he was so damn tired. “And when the hell are we supposed to sleep?” He added in question, as the car finally began to move. Elfman kept his dark blue eyes forwards on the road, his brow lowering.

“It’s not police business, if that’s what you’re thinkin’…” He answered quietly, earning Gray’s hard stare back over him, as he continued to drive. “But it is about what I had to deal with earlier this morning… With Erza.” He added, his voice was still quiet. Almost as if he was afraid of being too loud, even though they were clearly alone in the car.

Gray’s eyes were narrowing in on his partner in question. Just when he had thought the day could not have gotten any stranger, reality was sucker punching him once again and it made him almost afraid to ask.

“So…” He began, his own voice quiet now, as well. “Where we going then?” He questioned cautiously.

“We’ve got a meeting…” Elfman started. His head was turning so that his dark blue eyes could match up with Gray’s dark navy ones. “With gramps.”

Juvia had decided to take them to one of the locally owned restaurants in Magnolia, a place she visited quite frequently. Gajeel was aware of it, as he had accompanied her there once or twice. Enough times to know that he did enjoy their house steak burger. The car ride there had been rather quiet and mostly just consisted of him staring out the window, while Juvia told the cab driver where to go. She was baiting her time and Gajeel knew it. He could tell that she had a lot to say to him, just from the way she was sitting in the car. She was quite literally on the edge of her seat, due to her building anxiety. Gajeel couldn’t help, but roll his eyes at her, as he knew that it meant he was in for a lashing.

Once they were inside the long narrow restaurant, Juvia showed Gajeel over to a corner booth near a large window, by simply walking over towards it, without a word. She turned to face him, setting her bag down in the seat beside where she would be sitting and then she stared at him expectantly. Gajeel matched her stare with a hard glare of his own; he was still standing by the door, where they had just walked in and he had yet to move.

He was inspecting the diner-like space with discretion; it was decently crowded with customers inside, due to it currently being prime time dinner hours. The buzz of conversation was coming from all sides and invading his ears like a swarm of insects. Gajeel found it to be a nuisance, he wasn’t overly fond of crowds, but he knew it was probably for the best, because at least this way they would most likely not be heard by anyone.

He was looking back towards Juvia, as she waited for him from her spot by their chosen table. He shot her a displeased scowl, but of course she didn’t budge. She was unfazed by his cold outwards demeanor, as always. He closed his eyes in acceptance; a disgruntled breath escaping his throat,
before he hobbled his way over to where she was standing. She finally took her seat as Gajeel had just reached the adjacent booth and was getting into it cautiously. Juvia’s eyes were still on him as he finally settled down into the seat across from her, with a groan. He was just about to yell at her for notably staring at him, when the waitress approached the table before either of them could speak.

She was young and very pretty, with an alluring set of emerald green eyes that spoke of her kindness. Her bubblegum pink mane cascaded all the way down, past her waist even while being tied back into a ponytail. The long strands that were her bangs framed her face with an elegant twirl. The sheer volume and wave of her hair overall, made her resemble that of a storybook princess or something of equal enchantment. She was wearing a form fitting red collared shirt and skirt, with knee high stockings, which appeared to be the uniform.

She glanced down at Gajeel first, before her eyes then landed on Juvia. Her lips were curving up into a contagious smile, upon seeing the other woman.

“Juvia!” She greeted happily, her eyes closing in bliss, upon singing the other woman’s name. “It’s nice to see you!”

Gajeel’s unsuspecting glance was moving from the younger girl, back to the woman who sat across from him, with curiosity. Juvia was matching the girl with a tiny, but pleased smile.

“Meredy.” Juvia addressed kindly. “How are you, how is school?” She questioned next.

“Oh, you know! Hanging in there!” Meredy replied modestly, before opening her eyes and looking back at Gajeel, who had yet to move. He was too caught up in a state of suspense from the odd exchange he was witnessing, to do anything. “You must introduce me to your friend!” Meredy added, a nervous laugh escaping her as she said this, most likely alarmed by Gajeel’s brooding appearance.

“Oh yes!” Juvia chimed, while gesturing a hand over in Gajeel’s direction. “This here is my dear friend Gajeel. We’ve known each other for many years.” Juvia added quickly, her smile never diminishing as her hand fell back to the table.

“Ah I see.” Meredy replied, after a quick glance back at Juvia. She then angled her body to face Gajeel and lowered her head slightly, in a polite bow towards him, while her hands rested together, over her lap. “Hello! Nice to meet you Gajeel.” She spoke, before bringing her head back up, to look at him, with a lovely grin over her face. Gajeel just gave her a once over with his usual hard glare, seemingly uninterested from his basic expression and said nothing. Meredy was quickly growing uncomfortable with his lack of response to her, until Juvia finally spoke up, breaking the awkward tension.

“I apologize Meredy.” Juvia’s smile had disappeared, as the young girl looked back at her in question. Juvia’s eyes were closed “Forgive Gajeel, he is not what one would call, polite.” Juvia finished. Her eyes were opening, so that her devoid stare could stab deep into the man sitting across from her, while a frown formed its way over her face. Gajeel shot her a scowl in response. He had a few choice words for her, but he decided to keep his mouth shut for the time being, thinking better of it. “We’d like to order.” She added, taking her eyes off of him finally.

Both Juvia and Gajeel placed their orders immediately as they both had already known what they wanted from the menu, without looking. Meredy then quickly left to go and fetch them their drinks. While she was gone, Gajeel was able to get a phone charger from Juvia. He also managed to find an outlet next to their booth to plug it into. His dead phone was finally charging back to life when
Meryd returned with two glasses. Then after a few more minutes of small talk between the two familiar women, to which Gajeel didn’t pay any mind too. Meryd was finally walking away again. Juvia was watching the girl leave, a slight sigh of longing escaping her throat as Gajeel stared at her with his own hard glare still firmly locked in place.

“What a sweet girl…” Juvia commented, more to herself than to anyone. Gajeel watched her for a few seconds before finally deciding to speak.

“Yea, all the more reason to stay away from her.” He muttered as Juvia’s gaze finally settled over him. He had closed his eyes as he sat there with his arms folded over his chest, an unmoving and stubborn man to the very end. Juvia could easily see where this was going. It was finally time they hashed things out, but she needed to think carefully before she spoke, as she needed to be ready to combat him properly. She too closed her eyes, taking in another few seconds worth of contemplating, before she finally made her move.

“Yes…” She breathed, opening her eyes. “Speaking of sweet girls…” Gajeel opened his as well; the two of them were now caught in the midst of a heightened stare down, before Juvia continued. “Is that always the philosophy you carry for them Gajeel?” The question was firm, yet cutthroat with the way she voiced it and she wasn’t even done yet. “Or… Do you perhaps make an exception to this rule from time to time?” She finished, slaying him with the underlying meaning of her words.

Though, her voice was void of emotion to most, Gajeel knew better. She was fuming and he could recognize it in the sound. He shifted uncomfortably from where he was sitting, the muscles in his arms were tensing, but they stayed folded. He had known this was coming and though he accepted it, it didn’t mean he was happy about it.

“Look.” He began. “I didn’t mean fer any of it to happen.” He told her in his defense. His body seemed uncomfortable, but his stare however, did not waver. Juvia’s fingers were curling underneath the table, but she showed no other outward sign of her piling frustrations with him.

“Oh really? Is that so?” She questioned abruptly. “Well then, while we’re on the subject. Would you mind telling me, what all, ‘it’ entails? Because I can assure you, while I may have some vague idea of what went on last night, I know it can’t possibly be as convoluted as what actually happened, considering how you are looking these days, can it?” She added hastily, her words though calm, were somehow like venom.

Gajeel’s brow was lowering as his gut churned in displeasure. Man, was she pissed… He couldn’t even remember the last time he had seen her so mad. From an outsider’s perspective she appeared perfectly fine, but he knew she was furiously screaming on the inside. Gajeel was swallowing nervously, though he wasn’t fearful of Juvia. She was in fact making him relive the guilt of everything he had put Levy through and he loathed it.

Okay…” He sighed in an effort to ease himself into thinking clearly. He honestly didn’t even know where to begin. “What do ya wanna know?” He asked.

“That girl, Gajeel.” Juvia demanded, referring to Levy. “What the hell did you do to her?” Gajeel froze, as some of Juvia’s anger unleashed over him, through her voice. His eyes were widening as she continued. “She was so worried about you. And yet… I can’t help, but think, that you were somehow responsible for the ugly cut across her face… Who is she?” Juvia questioned, her eyes were narrowing in spite. Gajeel could feel his heart pounding, though he didn’t understand why he was dreading this as much as he was. It was sickening as the guilt just wouldn’t leave him be.

“Levy…” He replied gently, his eyes were finally falling from Juvia’s face, in clear shame. “She… Ain’t anyone.” He stated.
Juvia’s eyes were widening on him, her anger erupting in the form of disbelief now. He was delusional if he thought she would believe that! After everything he had went through for her, or maybe it was his own form of self-denial? Juvia really didn’t know, but either way he was very clearly reluctant to deal with the truth, of this girl’s existence in his life.

“Gajeel!” Juvia snapped, forcing him to look back up at her. Her eyes were narrowing on him again and this time she was the one, to fold her arms. “Do you think me a fool? You were protecting her!” She hissed, a hand flying up. “Or do you not realize that yourself?” She added, eyeing him with a raised eyebrow.

“I never meant fer her to get involved.” Gajeel answered.

“Well you were careless.” Juvia scolded and her words burned like boiling water, making his own blood hot with anger.

“Don’t you think I know that, damn it!” Gajeel shouted back so loudly, with his hand slapping down on the surface of the table, that people were looking at the pair in confusion.

Gajeel didn’t care and neither did Juvia, for that matter. They both just stared at each other with wide eyes, from across the table, their expressions fierce with rage-fueled emotion. Silence passed over them long enough, for people to stop looking at them and then finally Juvia’s gaze shifted down.

“What happened to your leg Gajeel?” She asked, her voice was thick with irritation.

“Don’t you already know that?!” Gajeel hissed back. “I know Levy fucking told you!” He added just as coldly.

“You were stabbed right?” She asked heatedly, almost mockingly. “Well how did that happen? I want to know Gajeel!” She exclaimed. Her voice was quiet, but also desperate with frustration.

“Fine!” He uttered, completely annoyed. “I went to the damn Celestial Night Club last night, for a business meeting with Banaboster, and then I left with this!” He whispered angrily, his wounded leg stomping the ground with a thud, from underneath the table. Juvia watched him for a long moment, a frown over her face, before continuing.

“And where… Prêt ail did you go from there?” She asked knowingly, her voice was dry with cynicism. She looked so displeased with him and it made him furious, almost as if she had expected better of him for some reason, but she damn well shouldn’t have! Juvia should have known better than anyone, that he had no redeemable qualities. Gajeel sat back in his seat, looking at her with outraged disbelief.

“What the fuck do you want me to say, rain woman?!” He asked with a shrug, clearly at his wits ends, made obvious by the fluctuation in his voice. “Do you want me to say I fucked her? Is that it?!” He gasped out, nearly out of breath from the intensity of his own temper.

“I want you to tell me the truth!” Juvia raged back, her hands bracing the table as she leaned forwards. “And you can start by telling me who that girl is to you, because clearly, she means way more to you, than you are even willing to say!” Juvia’s back hit her own seat now. “Look at you!” She gestured towards him. “Look at what you’ve done for her?!” Her hand came back down to the table. “I can’t believe I didn’t already know about this person in your life! How could you keep something like that from me?!” Her hand had then patted over her own heart and she looked truly upset, her eyes were glossy. “That hurts Gajeel!” She cried out, her hand falling away.

“Oh shut the fuck up!” Gajeel snapped back, with angry skepticism, he was folding his arms again.
“Stop being so damn emotional! You know nothing!” He finished, a finger pointing at her.

“Oh Really?!” I know nothing!?” Juvia repeated incredulously.

“You heard me!” Gajeel seethed. His hand once again slammed down, on the table and this time it was Juvia, who was now the one pointing.

“Liar!” She spat and surprisingly it made him wince. “You are lying to me and yourself! I know this Gajeel! You were never good at it!”

Gajeel had nothing to say in response to this accusation, as it was true. He had always been good at stonewalling, in due part with his high tolerance for pain, but never had he had a talent for flat out lying. Most likely, because he had never liked doing it and so he just couldn’t pull it off successfully. Gajeel had never preferred manipulation as a tactic, he was too hands on for such games.

“Yea?! And so what if I am?” He hissed. “Does it really matter anyways?! We both know it’s for the best!”


“What kind of stupid question is that? Of course, it is! Look at me! Look at what I do! You really think that I have any right to-to” He was choking on the sentence like he couldn’t even fathom speaking it.

“To be with her?” Juvia finished for him, making both of them instantly hush, now that the words had actually been voiced out loud.

Silence finally reigned over them as Gajeel felt completely an utterly mixed up inside. He hadn’t even realized how much he actually cared for Levy until Juvia had flat out pointed it out to him. Was it possible he loved her? How would he even know if he did? He hadn’t even an inkling of what that was like. His spectrum of emotions mostly just consisted of anger and arrogance. He felt like such an idiot for not knowing for sure, or for not figuring it out sooner, but none of it really mattered anyways. Even if he maybe did feel something for Levy, there could never be anything between them again. Even if she had been worried about him, like Juvia had mentioned, that was a far cry from love. And besides, they had both agreed that their one night together was the end of everything, so now he needed to get her out of his mind, just as he had gotten her out of his life. It was far too dangerous for her and he knew that… But, the whole idea of never seeing her again, was leaving him to feel listless and empty inside.

“Gajeel…” Juvia spoke his name gently. Her voice was of great contradiction than it had just sounded not minutes before. He looked up at her and she was smiling at him warmly, though her eyes looked very sad. “She seems like a wonderful person.”

“She is…” He answered softly after a breath. “Very clever and hard working.”

“Certainly cute.” Juvia added lightly.

“Yea…” Gajeel stated with his small unique laugh coming out. “Feisty. She doesn’t put up with any of my crap.” He looked up and out the window, his mind spinning into madness. “Maybe… I fell for her right away…” Gajeel paused, truly not knowing if he had or not. He was hoping it wasn’t true, as he thought back to that very first night they had met in the alleyway. His eyes narrowed, as the images returned to him with a vengeance. “Did I…? That night… Four years ago…” The way she had stood up to him, so bold, so beautiful. Her large gold eyes searching him for mercy as if she had actually dignified him with possessing humanity, rather than seeing him for the dark monster that he
truly was. “Damn…” Gajeel cursed, his head falling down. For some reason, he felt like his heart was breaking and he couldn’t even fully grasp what was happening to him. His hand was going up and over his eyes as he swallowed again, his mouth was dry and his throat hollow. It actually hurt him; he hadn’t thought it was possible.

Juvia was watching Gajeel from across the table, her smile was now gone as she witnessed him struggle internally. She could see that he was in pain and feel her own warm tears welling up, because of it, as she hated to see him like that. How was it that realizing you might love someone, could be such a hard thing to endure? She reached towards him, in a need to somehow ease him, even though she knew she couldn’t possibly. Her fingers graced the knuckles of his one hand gently. Gajeel moved the other hand away from his eyes, so that he could look at her face again. She met him with a very sympathetic and moving expression.

“Gajeel… Won’t you see her again?” Juvia asked and it was with that question, that Gajeel suddenly woke up with icy realization. He pulled his hand out from under hers abruptly, so that he could once again fold his arms. It was almost as if he was reeling back in all of the uncomfortable emotions he had just been feeling, and forever trapping them to his chest, to never come out again.

“No…” He answered definitively, looking away from her again. Juvia was watching him, startled by the magnitude of his absolute resolve.

“How can you say that?” She asked. Her tone was almost pleading with him to reconsider.

“Like I said rain woman… I’ve known Levy fer four years now and in that time, even while mostly stayin’ away all I’ve ever managed to do, is bring her trouble and last night…” Juvia was staring at Gajeel’s profile; his eyes were narrowing in disgust, but his focus was settled on something outside, through the window. “Last night was a nightmare.”

“Gajeel… You still haven’t told me what exactly happened…” Juvia stated as Gajeel turned his head back towards her.

“Do you remember Thibault?” Juvia nodded at his question, though a chill ran through her.

“I do, though I can’t say I much care for him… He stares…” Juvia answered.

“Yea well, I never liked him either… I always got a bad vibe from him. He was at the meetin’ last night and then he lingered…”

“At the club you mean?” Juvia asked.

“Yea… And well… Levy was there too ya see… Just by chance, out with friends I guess… I hadn’t seen her in a while… And well, I never get anywhere with her. She always shoots me down, before I can hardly get a line out…” Gajeel laughed a bit at this, but then he continued as Juvia, was looking at him with wide eyes. “I know… Surprising right? Most women don’t seem to mind when I come onto ‘em, but those women aren’t like Levy… They’re stupid.” He paused a proud smirk over his face. “She puts up with me for about a minute, more out of politeness than anythin’, then she tells me to get lost… Never stops me from tryin’ though… She really is something else…” He paused again; his smirk was now a full out toothy grin, as he shook his head. But then slowly, his smile began to fade, as his expression became grim. “Well last night I went ahead and gave it another go, once I saw Levy there… And well… I mighta been a bit more pushy than usual… Not sure what came over me, but I just couldn’t leave her be…” He shook his head again, his frown turning into a grave scowl. “I shoulda just walked away… Like she wanted me too.” The regret was there in his voice, as he said this. “Thibault noticed.” He added, after a long pause. “And he was pissed at me, so he targeted Levy…” Juvia straightened up after hearing this. Her body had gone stiff with shock as she dawned
Gajeel with wide eyes.

“Oh Gajeel he didn’t-?”

“No.” Gajeel interjected quickly. His voice was wrought with anger. “But he fucking tried, that sick fuck!” His fist came falling down hard onto the surface of the table, making their drinks rattle. “He fucking cornered her in the bathroom and then slammed her head into the damn toilet! He nearly knocked the fucking life outta her, but don’t ya fucking worry, because I nearly knocked the damn life out of him right after!” Gajeel finished coldly. His words were just above a whisper, so nobody could hear. Juvia’s heart practically stopped after hearing this and seeing Gajeel’s savage anger.

“Gajeel did you kill him?!” She questioned alarmed. She was suddenly realizing how horrible this whole situation was. If Jose found out what Gajeel had done to Thibault, well it would most likely not be good, as it could end up costing the Phantom Organization in the long run. They would most likely lose their business negotiations with Twilight Ogre, if this secret got out.

“No! But I fucking wish I had!” She was breathing out in relief at that. “Don’t act so relieved, because trust me, what I did to him, wasn’t much better.” Gajeel spat, making Juvia stare at him again, with an unsuspecting stare. “The cops probably stuck him in the hospital by now… Because I fucking left his broken ass there, in the parking lot to bleed…”

“Gajeel... This… This isn’t good… If he is alive, he is going to tell someone what you did to him… Word will get out!”

“You really don’t get it…” Gajeel seethed coldly. His voice was so bitter that it actually made Juvia shudder, from the murderous intent in it. “I’m not even sure his brain is goin’ to work right, after what I did to him Juvia… I shattered the bones in his face like they were glass.” Her eyes were large ovules, as she took in his words with misunderstood fear. He looked so numb and calculating and she had never seen him that way before, not to such an extent. “Levy witnessed the whole fucking thing…” He added coolly, taking a shallow breath while leaning forward. “So, tell me… Does that sound like somebody who deserves to be with her?” He questioned. Juvia couldn’t speak; her brain was struggling to keep up everything he was telling her. He leaned back against his seat, after having received no response from her, the brutality of his stare unchanging. “That’s what I thought….”

There was silence once again, the span of it lasting minutes, until finally Juvia was able to actually think straight. She was finally remembering that Gajeel had also been hurt.

“He-He was the one who stabbed you then...? Thibault…?” She asked timidly, still in deep alarm after everything he had just confessed to her.

“Yea… In the parking lot, right before I paid him back with steel.” Gajeel answered raising a fist, to stand for his brass knuckles.

“Then… That was when you went with Levy?” Juvia asked, trying to fill in the rest.

“She begged me to let her help… And then she took me back to her apartment.” Gajeel stated, his hand was patting the knee of his bad leg. “She stitched me up there.” He replied, rather proudly. Almost as if he was impressed by what Levy could do and wasn’t ashamed to brag about it for her.

“And the phone?” Juvia asked. “It was hers she said…” Gajeel nodded.

“Right… I didn’t find out bout it, till this morning… She had left it in the club bathroom, along with all of the blood from her wound as well as a good amount of Thibault’s, from when I socked him. I had promised her I wouldn’t let her get involved anymore, than she already was… And so once I
found out bout it… Well you understand… I couldn’t have the cops findin out about her.”

“I do…” Juvia nodded in understanding. “More importantly Master Jose can’t find out.”

“You can’t tell anyone about her Juvia…” Gajeel suddenly rounded on her. “Not a soul… You are the only one who knows about her, at all and I… I just…”

“Can’t risk it… I understand Gajeel.” Juvia finished for him and somehow, he knew she did.

“That is why I trust you rain woman.” Gajeel answered and Juvia nodded.

“What about Totormaru? Aren’t you concerned about him saying something to Jose?” Juvia asked. “He does know about the phone.”

“I can’t really account for him. But since he has no knowledge of Levy or who the phone belongs too, I’m not really all that worried bout it.” Gajeel explained, but Juvia was shaking her head in disagreement.

“Well I am… He questioned me a lot, while I was trying to bribe him to steal that evidence for you. I had to keep reminding him that it wasn’t something we should be discussing there and then I lied, and told him he’d find out later. He may not know about Levy, but he could easily go to Jose and then cause him, to come after you next. Especially if he has any inclination of what you did to Thibault. I’m not so sure you should brush all of that off as nothing, Gajeel…” Juvia replied wisely, but Gajeel just shrugged.

“I can handle Jose if that happens…” Gajeel answered, but Juvia just tilted her head in misunderstanding.

“Gajeel…” She addressed, earning his stare. “He is a dangerous man… Or have you forgotten, because of his kindness towards us?” Gajeel was subconsciously gripping his scar littered arm, at her words.

“No… Trust me I haven’t…” He stated darkly. “But so long as it is just me he ends up gunnin for, I can deal with it.”

“Well… Unlike you, I am scared.” Juvia replied. “I don’t wish to see anything happen to you, because over the years I’ve begun to notice the many disappearances…” Just as Juvia was saying this, Meredy was returning to their table, with two plates of food.

Juvia immediately sat back and shut her mouth, much to Gajeel’s relief. It seemed that for the moment, their conversation was over and he was glad for it. That wasn’t really something he wanted to think about, nor discuss. If anything, he was always trying to put it out of his mind and he had always hoped it was something Juvia hadn’t picked up on, since she was just the attorney.

Meredy handed them their plates and then walked away without even needing to refill their drinks. They hadn’t even really bothered to touch them, while being so enthralled in their conversation. The two of them carried on with eating, with only small bits of regular chatting here and there, almost as if they had reached an unspoken agreement to drop all earlier topics, for the moment. The mood was easing to normal between them, and they were mostly quiet while eating. That was until the phone charging on the table beside Gajeel, started to buzz, the vibration creating a funny sound over the surface it sat upon.

Gajeel turned his sight downwards while munching on a fry. There was a voicemail, someone had called, but the phone hadn’t rung. It had probably happened while it was still dead and had just shown up, due to efficient charge being achieved. He picked it up, pressing a few buttons before
“What is it?” She asked as Gajeel dropped the phone away from his ear to look at the screen, in search for a time and date of when the call had been received.

“Aria…” He stated the one simple name. “Says he just called like an hour ago, probably while we were on our way here… Jose is calling for an emergency meetin’. Tonight.” Juvia’s mouth fell open at this. “Check your phone.” Gajeel advised, with a glance up at her. “Cause it sounds like we’re all supposed to go.”

Juvia reached towards the bag that was next to her on the booth, scrambling through it for her phone. She finally found it and sure enough, there was a voicemail for her too. She also listened to it, her eyes on Gajeel as he ate another fry. She pulled it away from her ear and nodded.

“Yes… I am to be there, as well.” Gajeel just shoved another French fry in his mouth.

“Thought so…” He muffled between bites.

“This could be bad Gajeel… Emergency meeting?” Juvia asked. “Maybe he already knows something…”

“Could be…” Gajeel shrugged.

“And what about your leg? Are you going to hide that?” She asked.

“Not sure I really can, even if I wanted to…” He stated. “But… Speaking of that. We still have bout two hours before we gotta go and I’d really like to shower and change outta these damn clothes… Not only that, but I left my bike at the club…” Juvia stared at him with a doubtful look in her eyes.

“I see, but can you really drive it, like that?” Juvia questioned, with a gesture towards him on the side of his injured leg. This just earned her a large arrogant smirk in response.

“Don’t you worry bout me rain woman… I ain’t no sissy, I can handle it.” Juvia just shook her head at him, although she knew that to be true, it didn’t mean she approved of it.

“Oi! One more thing….” Gajeel started. “Don’t ya have somethin’ of mine?” He asked, his smirk spreading into a full out grin, as his hand came forward towards her expectantly, his palm open. “Bout time I be gettin’ those back, don’t ya think? Cough ‘em up!” He added and his red eyes were laughing at her. Juvia again shook her head, but that was the smug Gajeel she had always known.

Mirajane Strauss was a woman of exquisite beauty that easily rivaled that of models. In fact, it had been said by many that she had actually done some modeling to fund her way through college, back in her more youthful years. It was a believable anecdote upon looking at her, as she waited patiently in the fancy hall of the Universities’ top floor, in their showy admissions building.

She stood there refined, with her hands settled together over her lap. She was of average height; with a slender waist extenuated by the way her burgundy dress hugged it, before it fluttered out in waves, nearly all the way down to the floor. Though the garment hid her legs from view, it did little to hide the forgiving curve of her breasts, as she was certainly well endowed. The fluidity of her form was made all the more beautiful, by the pristine shine of her pale white skin. Then just like her brother and sister, her hair was of a snowy white sheen, that tumbled down to her waistline. Her personality was as welcoming, as her caring and lovely face suggested; she was of the sweetest nature. Her
navy-blue eyes were like two dark sapphires, much like that of her two younger siblings, and they spoke of her warmth. Lastly, she adorned her bangs into a small characteristic ponytail, that reached up from the hairline of her forehead.

There was a slight smile on her face as she stood unmoving, but relaxed. Her eyes were following the intricate pattern of the long rug that reached down the middle of the small hallway, gold lines over rich violet. She then shifted her gaze back over the black and white marble that the rug was settled over, marveling at it’s clean shine.

She was standing just off to the side, right before a set of two huge oak doors, the dean’s office. There were large canvas paintings lining the walls, modern art of all different colors as well as a few plants and sculptures. Down at the other end of the hall was an elevator and it was just as Mirajane was admiring the art for the umpteenth time, when the familiar ding finally sounded off.

Mira glanced up expectantly, her befitting smile still firmly planted over her face, as the doors to the elevator slid open and out stepped a rather tiny old man. Tiny was actually an understatement, he was basically child sized as far as his height went, and though he was clearly well past his prime, he stood with good posture.

He was wearing rather formal attire, a white coat with fur trim and gold embroidered over the shoulders. He stood with his hands behind his back, his face portraying frustration as his towering gray eyebrows were pushed together, further creasing his already wrinkled forehead. He was balding, his white hair spiking up and around the sides of his head. And he also had a rather large fluffy mustache over his face, concealing most of his displeased frown.

This man was Master Makarov, owner and dean of Mavis University. Well-known entrepreneur alongside his partner Gildarts Clive, successful at bringing in lots of business for Magnolia with his University alone, but with many other investments as well. He was to his credit, a good leader, but a bit unorthodox in his approach. Which most appreciated, but some however, found it to be unprofessional and didn’t much like him for that reason.

His wise old eyes landed over Mirajane, who had been waiting for him, before he finally stepped forward towards her. She could read the annoyance in his features, but her smile did not dwindle.

“Why hello Master!” She greeted in her light and well-suited voice, Mirjane was also known for her lovely singing.

“Erhm…” The old man grunted in response and Mira’s smile only brightened. Her eyes were closing happily as he approached. His steps were heavy almost like he was having a tantrum. “Have you heard anything about where that idiot is yet?!” He snapped the question, in his raspy age-worn voice, his anger making it that much fiercer. He was finally standing in front of her and Mira was looking down at him, her eyes opening.

“No, I’m afraid not… Lisanna actually hasn’t heard anything from him all week.” Mirajane informed. The subject of this news finally having an effect on her smile, as it had started to disappear, upon speaking about it. “She sounded quite worried, when I asked her about him today…” Mira drifted, a finger going up to her chin in contemplation. “I wish I could have told her the news…”

“That fool!” Makarov shouted, his fist clenching. “It’s just like him to do something like this! He’s making me regret my decision to let him back in!”

“Now, now Master. Perhaps he had a good reason?” Mirajane offered lightly, her smile returning, her faith forever loyal. She was always the type of person to search for something positive in every situation. It was part of the reason why Makarov had hired her as his assistant; he needed someone to
combat him, whenever he was feeling cranky with his old age. Makarov folded his arms stubbornly.

“Lets just get this meeting underway… Though I wanted him here, so we could figure out what to do with him, because of all of this! People will be here soon, so we can’t spend all day and night searching for him!” The old man huffed and Mira nodded.

“Very well!” She chimed, as she turned to approach his office entrance. Mira led the way, opening one of the large doors and moving aside to hold it open for him. Makarov stepped forwards, walking inside his office as he heard the sound of Mirajane shutting the door behind them, both of them finally having stepped inside the room.

Makarov glanced around the grand space upon entry. It was a very large rectangle, with navy carpeting and intricate paneled walls. There were two large windows that stretched from floor to ceiling, with a great view on the far wall and long fancy curtains that draped around them. He had a large ovule coffee table in the center of the room, with numerous armchairs surrounding it, that they’d be using for the meeting. There were many bookshelves of all sizes, lining the walls, as well as decorations and ornaments. There was another table off to one side, with a coffee machine and other such amenities. Then lastly, beyond the coffee table and chair before him, centered close against the far wall, was his grand desk.

Makarov’s eyes settled on the tall back of his comfortable desk chair, that was located just behind the large piece of furniture. It was currently turned away from him; probably from the last time he had used it. He often needed to turn it away, just so he could jump off of it without hitting the desk, due to his insufficient height. He let out a sigh, looking forward to taking a seat in it, as he had been on his feet all day, in an effort to find a very foolish young man, by the name of Natsu Dragneel.

It was just as Natsu’s name passed through Makarov’s mind, that the old man noticed his chair suddenly shift forwards. Almost as if someone was sitting in it and leaning. For a moment he thought it was just his old eyes playing tricks on him, that was until he heard the characteristic creak.

“Who’s’ there?!?” Makarov shouted in alarm, his eyes going wide. Mirajane also gasped, as she turned away from the door, with the realization that they were not alone from Makarov’s words. Both of them stood there immobile, as the chair whipped around to face them almost as if it had been recklessly kicked. They were met with two vigorous onyx eyes and a spiky mass of pink hair.

“Yo gramps! Heard you been lookin for me?!”

Chapter End Notes

I should have known better
Than to let you go alone,
It's times like these
I can't make it on my own
Wasted days, and sleepless nights
And I can’t wait to see you again

I find I spend my time
Waiting on your call,
How can I tell you, baby
My back's against the wall
I need you by my side
To tell me it's alright,
'Cos I don't think I can take anymore

Is this love that I'm feeling,
Is this the love, that I've been searching for
Is this love or am I dreaming,
This must be love,
'Cos it's really got a hold on me,
A hold on me...

I can't stop the feeling
I've been this way before
But, with you I've found the key
To open any door
I can feel my love for you
Growing stronger day by day,
An' I can't wait to see you again
So I can hold you in my arms

Is this love that I'm feeling,
Is this the love, that I've been searching for
Is this love or am I dreaming,
This must be love,
'Cos it's really got a hold on me,
A hold on me...

Is this love that I'm feeling,
Is this the love, that I've been searching for...
Is this love or am I dreaming,
Is this the love, that I've been searching for...

“Is This Love” By Whitesnake
Omen

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Monster

Chapter 11: Omen

The streets of Magnolia had calmed considerably now that the weekend was drawing to a conclusion, dusk was settling in where evening had just resided. The sun had finally made its descent below the contour of the cityscape, leaving a glow of lavender behind it. The buildings took on a vibrant gold-like hue as the sky faded to a rich navy, straight above. Rows of stars were just barely making themselves visible, each one resonating like a beacon among fog, lost against the many colorful lights of the city. The air was crisp and ripened with the oncoming scent of fall, as two people walked hand in hand, not too far off from the setting of Mavis University’s main campus.

They were a handsome couple, both similar in height. The woman’s hair was of notable length, even while tied back in a braid; the color of it was a unique sea foam green. The man was of darker complexion, with jet-black hair, gelled back to spike upwards. They were both adorned in country-western like attire, with the woman wearing cowboy boots and the man wearing a poncho. And though they were youthful, they held a certain vibe of true age-telling responsibility, that seemed in due part with the wedding bands around both of their ring fingers.

The two of them were strolling down the sidewalks of Magnolia together. Unburdened by the struggles of adulthood for the moment and taking advantage of the solace they found in each other’s singular company. Their peaceful smiles were built upon a foundation of mutual trust. And their eyes mirrored of blissful adolescence, with the great amount of wonder they seemed to elude too, as they took in their surroundings with such amazement. It was turning out to be a noticeably clear night in Magnolia and it made the city radiate beauty around them.

“Wow! Look at that! I can actually see the stars tonight!” The woman exclaimed, as she looked skyward. Her voice held a characteristic twang to it.

“Oh yea!” The man’s tone echoed her same excitement. “Well isn’t that something?” He questioned, also looking skyward.

“Tell me about it!” The woman replied, finally glancing over to him. “Reminds me of my hometown.” She added. Her lips were curving upwards as he matched eyes with her, but that was
also when he noticed her shiver slightly, as she looked back ahead.

“Say, you cold?” He asked growing concerned. His fingers were clawing into the heavy wool of his poncho. “You want this?” He questioned already in the process of trying to get it off.

“Naw…” She answered. “Let’s just get home. I have this strange feeling that Asuka might still be up, waitin’ for us.” The man smiled at his wife knowingly.

“Mother’s intuition.” He stated proudly. “We can’t go doubting that, can we?” He offered lightly earning a slight smirk from the woman next to him, who refused to look back his way.

“You best not be.” She answered in mock threat, earning a chuckle from her husband.

The couple began to pick up their walking pace, in an effort to reach said destination. Completely unaware that they were now being watched by the woman who had just passed by them, going the other way. The scarlet haired woman paused after hearing the tail end of their conversation and then turned around just in time to see the man once again, taking up his wife’s hand in his own, as their backs retreated away from where she was standing.

Erza Scarlet’s cheeks were becoming a shade of red worthy of her name, both due to the cold and from witnessing the pair’s loving exchange. There was a small puff of steam escaping her lips as she took a labored, yet longing breath. Her dark eyes were glistening from the cold air that was moving into them, as she watched the man then wrap an arm around his wife’s shoulders and bring her close. His head was resting over hers, before the two finally rounded the corner, out of sight.

Erza didn’t budge; she was at a standstill, her mind recounting their words with a mixture of contentment, yet selfish pining. There was a small warm smile over her lips, but her eyes portrayed a hint of anguish. It only lasted for a few seconds after the couple had disappeared, before she finally turned back in the direction she had been walking, her features fading to a stoic expression once more.

She was wearing her coat, a scarf and some gloves. She was holding something large and thin, with a tarp tied around it under her one arm. It, sort of resembled that of some kind of large canvas painting dimensionally, but the shape of it was odd, and not rectangular. Which was noticeable from the way it stuck out unevenly, on each side. She carried on, with her usual strong posture, each step firm until she felt the tickling buzz of her phone from the inside her coat pocket.

Erza had to stop walking, in order to maneuver her hand into the pocket of her coat, with the large item still snug under her one arm. She pulled out the still vibrating phone, glancing down at the number that said unknown, before finally managing to answer it and push it up to the side of her face.

“Funny you should call… I was just thinking of you.” She greeted with a small smirk over her lips.

“Oh really…? Should I be flattered or concerned…?” Came a calm male voice on the other end of the phone.

“Maybe a little of both.” Erza teased. Her voice was lowering, her smirk still firmly intact, as she continued to walk.

“Well then… I guess I’ll just have to wait and see for myself, later. Won’t I…?”

“Oh...?” Erza’s tone was inflated in question. “Do you plan on paying me a visit then…?” She asked in piqued curiosity.
“It’s likely... Because I may have something for you...” He answered, his tone growing more serious.

“Is that right?” Erza replied. Her voice was also lowering into a more business-like tone.

“They are holding a meeting... Tonight.” The man informed.

“I see...” Erza answered, her eyes narrowing. “I can’t say I’m surprised...”

“You’re on your way to yours...?” The voice questioned.

“Yes...” Erza answered.

“Good... I’ll keep you posted...” He stated.

“Be on your guard...” Erza warned.

“Always.” The voice answered quickly and then the line went immediately dead. Erza pulled the phone away from her ear to look down at it, a frown forming over her face. She continued to stare at the object in her hand, until she approached the curve. Finally arriving at the closest intersection, for the road that she would need to cross next. She came to a halt, glancing up to see the campus buildings in her sights just a short distance away. She was nearly there.

Makarov’s office was oddly quiet considering the invasion of a certain reckless young man, who had been forced to sit elsewhere after a very brutal scolding from the puny old timer, who was now planted rightfully in his own desk chair. His hands were wrung together and resting on the desk. There was a stern look over his face as he kept a steady eye over said, young hooligan.

Natsu Dragneel was now sitting back in a different chair, with his feet kicked up over the large ovule coffee table, in the center of the room. His expression could best be described as unimpressed, as Makarov’s stare continued to burn into him watchfully. He was a lean young man, dressed in beige baggy pants with a white, short sleeved shirt on and a red zip up hoodie overtop of it. He also had a long white scarf, wrapped around his neck; the pattern and fabric of it, resembling something akin to a reptile’s skin. His face was boyish, and his complexion, somewhat tan. His scalp was a mass of short spikes, that went in most every direction; the color, a vibrant light pink. His black eyes exuded energy and his overall presence could best be described as fiery. All of these aspects, that seemingly made Natsu come across as a very overbearing individual, were well balanced out by, the pureness of a heartwarming smile.

For the moment though, Natsu was not grinning. No, instead he was staring up at the ceiling with his arms folded and his eyebrows lowered in complete boredom. Which was fine, because Mirajane’s lovely smile, more than made up for the lack of happiness in that room, as she stood just off to the side of the entryway, in wait for whoever would walk in first. The three of them sat in silence, as the minutes passed on by; meanwhile Natsu’s patience was fading until he could no longer stand it.

“Oh jeeze...!” He finally bellowed out. His head falling backwards in frustration, as he let loose a loud groan. “How long is this gonna take gramps?! Can we just get this goin’ already?!” He whined, as he looked back up to Makarov, who was now gritting his teeth with eyes closed. Natsu could just make out the slight movement of the old man’s tightly clenched fists, quivering with annoyance. The veins in his crinkled forehead were starting to become visible, all while turning purple as he was clearly fed up with Natsu’s complaining. It hadn’t been the first time he had voiced his boredom.
“You’re half the reason, we are holding this meeting!” The old man barked, unable to control his anger. “So just sit there and stay quiet!” He ordered, making Natsu just look away in irritation.

“Oh whatever…” Natsu muttered just under his breath, his eyes now settling on the bookshelves, as quiet once again took over the room.

The peace reigned on for a few more minutes until finally the door to Makarov’s office whipped open forcefully, revealing an enraged Gray, still clad in his police uniform. Elfman stood towering just behind him, the larger man was sighing in displeasure over his partner’s outburst.

“Where the hell is he?!” Came Gray’s loud voice, echoing throughout the hallway that was just behind him, as he marched into the threshold of Makarov’s office. Both of his arms were clenched at his sides, like he was about ready to strangle someone.

“Why hello Gray!” Mirajane greeted cheerfully, from the side. She was completely unfazed by Gray’s tantrum, as he began ripping off his coat and throwing it into her awaiting arms. Natsu sat forward, his feet touching the ground, so he could turn his head and look at the loud newcomers who were now entering the room. He viewed them both with a blank and unsuspecting look on his face.

“Natsu!” Gray bellowed, marching forwards as he set his sights on his pink haired target. His hands were now reaching for the neckline of his uniform shirt as he began tugging at the collar, like he was about ready to rip that off as well.

“Hey sis…” Elfman muttered to Mira, as he politely handed her his folded coat and walked in step, just behind Gray.

“Elfman!” Mira chimed his name in greeting, as she hung up the two coats on a standing coat rack just behind her. Her smile never dwindled, as she then turned to watch Gray approach Natsu. The first shirt was already being discarded to the floor, revealing the white T-shirt, Gray had been wearing underneath his uniform.

“There you are! You idiot! I’m gonna kill you!” Gray was raging, his fingers now beginning to pull at the last T-shirt, that was still tucked into the belted pants of his work clothes.

“Oh yea?!” Natsu was shouting back in response, as he jumped to his feet and swung around to face Gray’s oncoming anger. The chair was still between them, but they both looked about ready to jump each other, despite it. “And I suppose you need to strip down, just ta do that, huh!? Ya freakin’ weirdo! What the hells a matter with ya?!”

“With me?!” Gray was shouting, just as the last shirt got pulled off, right over his head. “Are you freakin’ kiddin me?!” Gray snapped, throwing his white shirt straight down onto the ground. “You’re the one, starting fires!” Gray exclaimed, with a finger pointing at Natsu’s chest.

“So, what!? I don’t need ta explain myself to you!” Natsu countered, folding his arms and looking away, his voice equally loud.

“That’s it!” Gray shouted, his half-naked body lunging at Natsu, bringing both boys down to the floor of Makarov’s office, with a loud bang.

“Oh man…” Elfman was moaning. His blue eyes were glancing upwards as he stood next to Mira, a hand was slapping to his forehead. “I knew this was coming… He was so pissed, when I told him…”
“Boys will be boys…” Mira added with a light laugh towards her brother, as they watched the two men wrestle around on the floor. Gray had Natsu in a hold, but Natsu had just managed to get a hand free and was reaching for Gray’s face blindly.

“Natsu…!” Gray was growling as Natsu had just started to grab the skin of his cheek and was pinching it very hard. “You are such a morron…” He slurred out through a partially open mouth, as Natsu just wouldn’t let go of his face.

“Shut up! I don’t wanna hear it from you of all people!” Natsu snapped back, as he was just managing to wrangle himself free, but then Gray rolled, making both of their bodies knock over one of the chairs.

“Knock it off, the both of you!” Makarov was shouting. The small old man was standing on his chair, to get a better look; both of his hands were slamming down onto the surface of his desk. “You two are going to destroy my office!” He added, but his shouts were overlapped by more arguing between the two, fully grown men, who were behaving like children. That was until a third body suddenly appeared in the room, completely unnoticed until her deep commanding voice sounded off, alerting them all.

“Quit it you two, or you will both answer to me.” Came the threat and just like that, both Natsu and Gray froze instantly. Their heads were beginning to tremble, as they turned to look towards the doorway where Erza Scarlet stood her ground, with the sheer dominating confidence of a true queen. Mira and Elfman, had also both turned to see Erza standing there, clearly surprised, as nobody had even seen her enter.

“Oh! Why hello Erza!” Mira greeted, as Natsu and Gray were scrambling to get to their feet. Gray was righting the chair they had knocked over, as Natsu was quickly taking his seat in one of the others. Both of them were suddenly quiet, terrified by the prospect of upsetting Erza. “I didn’t hear you come in.” Mira added, as Erza smiled at her. Elfman stayed quiet, as he was also too scared to speak to Erza for the moment. “Can I take your coat...? Oh! What is it you got there?” Mira questioned, as she took notice of the large object Erza had tucked under her one arm.

“Thank you, Mira, but no…” Erza answered as she stepped forward, towards the middle table, where Natsu and Gray were now both sitting around. “Master…” Erza greeted, with a glance towards Makarov, as she approached and he simply nodded, his face grim. Then finally Erza came to a stop, as she reached the table and the room was quiet.

All eyes were on her as she glanced down at the tabletop before her, then without warning, she carelessly dropped the large object she had been holding onto the surface. It made a horrible clanking sound, as if made of metal, bouncing against the wood once or twice. The noise of it, was loud enough to make everyone in the room, but Erza jump, as she just stared at it dejectedly, until it finally stopped rocking.

“What the hell is that thing!?” Gray demanded in annoyance. His hands were firmly planted over his ears and his expression was one of cringing.

“Is that-?” Elfman began, but he was immediately silenced as Erza shot him a warning glare from over her shoulder.

“Shh Elfman! I want Natsu…” She began, as her head turned towards the pink haired young man, who was staring wide-eyed at her, with a gulp. “To tell everyone what this is…”

“Ugh… Well… I…” Natsu began, his black eyes were darting elsewhere in the room and he was beginning to sweat. He could feel Erza’s eyes boring into him as he swallowed again. Her hands
were now on the table as she leaned her upper body towards him, in angry anticipation for his answer. There was pause. “It was just…” Another pause. “Ya know, like a…” His voice was growing quieter. “Message…” And with that, there was a loud thud as Erza’s hands slapped down onto the tabletop.

“What the hell is the matter with you?!” She screamed, her loud thundering voice filling the room. “What were you thinking!? Why would you ever think this, to be a good idea?!” Erza continued on. All of her anger was pouring out, in the form of questions upon questions, all directed towards Natsu, in which she allowed him no time to answer a single one.

“Oh my…” Mira laughed lightly, as the rest of them were forced to listen to Erza’s ruthless attack on Natsu.

“You don’t suppose she has an off switch, do you…” Elfman was muttering.

“I don’t know… But why is it okay, for her to yell at him and not me?” Gray asked in annoyance, as he watched Natsu cower before Erza. His arms were stretching up and going back, to rest behind his head.

“Maybe, because, she can at least keep her clothes on when she does it?” Mira suggested, with a smile towards Gray. This forced him to glance down and see the lightly colored flesh of his own abdominals, almost as if he had completely forgotten that he was still sitting there, half-naked. Gray’s eyes shifted back up, in mild embarrassment, but he tried to play it off, as if he didn’t care.

“Or maybe it’s because, she didn’t attack him…” Elfman added as a jab towards his partner. “Well…” He then paused, watching Erza’s angry expression, as she continued to yell ferociously. “Not yet, at least…” He then mumbled, thinking better of his own comment. None of them would have been surprised if it came to that, as Erza was not one, to ever make angry.

“Alright… Alright!” Makarov was finally the person, to interrupt Erza’s shouting. She stood straight, her mouth going closed, as she looked back up to the old man with a stoic expression over her face. Natsu’s face however, was white with fear, as his head was trembling in the direction of the old man, who was now speaking to them. “Show us…” Makarov demanded. “I can’t understand, until I see…” And with that, Erza nodded.

“Yes…” She answered as she began to reach down; her fingers were gracing the tie that was keeping the tarp snuggly wrapped around the large object. She then slowly began to undo it. “This was purposely left at the scene…” She started to say, as she began to open the tarp. “I say purposely, because it was slathered in oil and set ablaze, while hanging on a pike, so that it would stick out in the center of the building.” Mira gasped upon finally seeing the revealed object, as Makarov and Gray’s eyes just grew wide. Mira glanced up to her brother in awe.

“So then, you saw this already, didn’t you?” She asked him, earning a sigh from Elfman, as he folded his arms.

“Yes…” Erza echoed, her head looking back towards Natsu again. “You’re lucky…” She told him with a deep tone of warning. “You’re lucky I received word about this, before anyone else did… Because if anyone had beaten me to the site… I wouldn’t have been able to cover this up for you…” She added grimly, but Natsu just folded his arms and turned his head away from her in frustration.

“Who says I wanted you to cover it up?” Natsu replied rather matter-of-factly. “I left it there for a
“Where did you- Where did you get this thing?!” Gray asked incredulously, with wide disbelieving eyes.

“Well, if ya gotta know… I made it!” Natsu answered.

“Why?!” Makarov’s voice chimed in, his fist hitting the desk, as all eyes fell on him now. “Why Natsu?! Why on earth would you do something so… So foolish!?” The old man scolded. “You went out of your way! Acting rashly, leaving evidence! You misused all of the information we’ve been entrusting to you, these last few months… Taking matters into your own hands…! Did you think this would help our cause, or was this for your own, personal vendetta?!” Makarov demanded, his voice was shaking with rage. The room was quiet as Natsu and the old man locked eyes. Natsu no longer looked afraid, if anything he looked thoroughly serious, as he held his composure against the old man’s anger.

“No…” Natsu replied, his voice firm. “You’re right though… I do want revenge, I ain’t sayin’ I don’t… But that’s not why I did it…” Natsu paused, taking a breath. “They needed to be stopped…” Natsu’s eyes were shifting elsewhere in the room, before he then looked down. “There was so much money, just sittin’ there in that warehouse… And I think we all have a pretty good idea on what they were planning to use it for…” Natsu’s fist was squeezing shut so tightly, that it was trembling. “Well I just couldn’t let ‘em go through with it! I knew… That if… It were all to just… Disappear, somehow…” His tight fingers were finally releasing, his hand opening. “If I could just burn it all to ash!..! Then their whole operation would be goin’ up in smoke with it…” Natsu answered as everyone in the room began to eye each other, during the few seconds of silence, before Natsu continued. “And I knew, none of you, would go along with my plan… Considerin’ the legal risk and my history and all’.... But there wasn’t time to sit around and debate about it…” He paused again, his gaze still downwards. “To me… The backlash I’d be receiving from you all, was worth the risk, if I could just ensure everyone’s safety in this town for even just a little bit longer…” He finally finished, his head coming back up as he met the stern eyes of Makarov, once more.

The room had once again fallen to silence, as everyone contemplated Natsu’s words with mixed thoughts. Then finally, the old man let out an audible sigh, gaining everyone’s attention, his eyes were shut.

“Natsu…” Natsu grew tense, as he waited for the old man to continue. “You’re still a fool.” Makarov answered, his eyes opening.

“What!?” Natsu gasped, practically falling over. “Even after all of that?! But gramps?!”

“The information we gave you, was meant to be used for more discreet methods…!” Makarov suddenly interjected, before continuing. “What you did, was not only the opposite of discreet, you practically signed all of our names to it, by leaving that monstrosity there!” Makarov snapped, his finger pointing to the object on the table.

“I had to gramps!” Natsu whined. “I’m gettin’ sick of all this discreet stuff! I want Phantom to know they’ve got someone gunnin’ for ‘em! I want Jose and all of his dumb lackeys shakin’, in their overly priced boots!” Natsu cheered, his fist shooting to the air in excitement.

“I like it!” Elfman suddenly spoke, with a fist hitting his open palm. “It is definitely the manliest approach!” He added enthusiastically. “Besides… That had to of given Phantom a bad reputation, right? Messed up their transaction and all… Who’d want to work with them after that?” Elfman asked, his question only raising more.
“Right…” Mira then spoke up, from besides her brother, a finger going up to her chin. “Do we actually know, who the money was for…?” Erza turned to face Mira, her arms folding and her head nodding.

“Yes. The money was meant to go to Banaboster of the Twilight Ogre Casino.”

“What?!” Both Gray and Elfman were exclaiming simultaneously, causing Erza to turn and look at the both of them, in question.

“Wait… When did you find that out…?” Elfman asked. “Ya didn’t know that earlier today…”

“My informant…” Erza answered. “He also made mention of this event possibly having the desired affect between Twilight Ogre and Phantom’s business relationship… Even if it wasn’t in the way, that we originally planned…” Erza added, her hands now settling on her hips. Her words had caused a cocky grin to form over Natsu’s face.

“See… I made the right move then.” Natsu interjected, making Erza suddenly round on him, without any hesitation.

“No. He wasn’t excusing the way you handled the situation and neither am I… You were reckless and immature!” Erza scolded in her strong voice, making Natsu’s smile instantly vanish, as he was reduced to a cowering wreck once again. “Not to mention, that what you did was also completely illegal! That isn’t the way we do things here!” Erza continued.

“But Jose plays dirty, so why shouldn’t we?! What’s it matter, so long as we stop that bastard from takin’ everything over??!” Natsu countered, equally angry as he got over his fear and faced Erza. “C’mon Erza! Everyday, we spend tryin’ to figure out how to do this the ‘right’ way, is another day Jose’s got on us, gatherin’ up more ammunition to use against everyone! Soon nobody, will be safe! Besides… He always manages to find his own work arounds, in this city. So obviously, our efforts of tryin’ to catch him, while workin’ within the law, are not doin’ the trick!” Natsu exclaimed.

He was on his feet, boldly standing face to face with Erza, who, for the moment was speechless. A few seconds of quiet passed on by, as Erza tried to think of how to logically combat Natsu’s speech of passion, over the subject on what they should do next.

“Natsu…” Mira began, finally breaking the silence, causing everyone to then look at her instead. “You had to of, had this up your sleeve for a few days then, didn’t you?” She asked. Natsu stepped back for a moment, away from Erza, as he kept a steady eye on Mira.

“Well Kinda… I mean… It took a few days of staking things out I guess… Just to figure out when exactly, things were goin’ down…” He answered, while rubbing the back of his spiky pink head, in confusion over why she was asking.

“I thought so…” Mira responded, glancing down. “Lisanna was very worried about you… ya know?” She explained, looking back up at him, with concerned eyes. Natsu’s mouth fell open, after hearing this news, but he hadn’t anything to say for the moment. He instead just staggered back down into his chair, his guilt obvious. “I spoke to her today…. And she basically told me, that you had been gone all week… And that she hadn’t even heard a word from you, during that whole time…” Mira finished as Natsu’s head hung slightly.

“What?!” Elfman bellowed. “You let my baby sister get all freaked out and worried over you, for no god damn reason?! What kinda man are you?!” His large tan hand was forming into a fist, that he was now sharking towards the seated Natsu, with great irritation.
“Look! It’s not like I was tryin’ to!” Natsu snapped. “This was important!” He then yelled back, in his own defense. “So just get off my case already?! I’ll go and see her right after this stupid meeting is over!”

“Yea well, Lisanna isn’t the only one you need to go and talk to…” A new voice suddenly sounded off from the hallway, as all eyes turned to see the tall figure of Cana now gracing their presence. “Lucy also thinks you’ve been ignoring her... And she could really use your support, about now…” Cana scolded, causing Natsu to look down and away from her, in slight shame. He had an awkward frown over his face, as he contemplated her words.

“Cana?! What the hell are you doing here?!” Gray was the first one to ask, what most of them were wondering. “I figured you’d still be hung over…” He teased, despite being still genuinely surprised, that she had shown up there. Cana hadn’t ever been part of their meetings before, at least as far as Gray knew. That was when Mira rose up a hand in response.

“Well I’m afraid that’s my doing actually…” Mira answered with a smile, as she looked towards the Master. “Sorry Master… I may have told a little fib earlier, when you asked me, if I had heard back from Gildarts… It was shortly after I sent out the message about this meeting, that I actually did hear back from him… Well his phone at least…” Cana was suddenly holding up said phone, as Mira continued to explain. “But I guess it wasn’t entirely a lie, as I suppose it wasn’t really him after all.”

“So, wait... That’s Gildart’s phone…?” Gray asked pointing to the phone in Cana’s hand.

“Well... I’m afraid that’s my doing actually…” Mira answered with a smile, as she looked towards the Master. “Sorry Master... I may have told a little fib earlier, when you asked me, if I had heard back from Gildarts... It was shortly after I sent out the message about this meeting, that I actually did hear back from him... Well his phone at least...” Cana was suddenly holding up said phone, as Mira continued to explain. “But I guess it wasn’t entirely a lie, as I suppose it wasn’t really him after all.”

“Yeah, sure is! Leave it to my old man, to take nothing with him when he leaves town... Not even his phone... Guess he can’t be bothered, with being contacted while out on his adventures... The selfish prick...” She mumbled the last part, as she began to walk forwards into the room towards where Gray was sitting. “And did you know that, despite him not being around... His phone still receives all of the messages Mira has been sending out, about your guys secret meetings...?” Cana questioned, in a mocking voice. “Man... Aren’t you guys lucky that it fell into my hands and not someone else’s...” She explained, leaning an elbow on the back of Gray’s chair, before she swatted him on the back of the head.

“Ow! What the hell was that for?!” He asked while rubbing the spot and looking back up at her, between wincing eyes.

“For that crack about me being hung over... Like that’d ever happen... At least I can keep my clothes on...” She murmured her eyes going back up, to glance around at everyone who was now staring at her.

“So wait... Mira...? You knew it was Cana and not Gildarts, who was getting those messages then...?” Elfman asked, as his sister nodded.

“Well... I just found out today actually... Because she replied to me...” Mira answered, as she looked Cana’s way. “And then I decided to keep her in on the loop, if she so wished to be... I mean... It was a bit late to play dumb about the whole thing, at this point, anyways...” Mira added lightly, with a laugh.

“Then you know what this about?” Erza asked, addressing Cana in her serious voice, leaving Cana to just nod in reply.

“To a degree... And I want in, but that’s not all... I came here for a specific reason tonight... Something else that I want to know more about...” She stated. “And I believe Gray is the one who can tell me.” She added.

“Me?” He asked in confusion, as Cana nodded.
“Yea…! I want to know more about what happened at the club last night! I deserve some answers, after the way you guys abandoned me!” Cana exclaimed, as if upset by the whole thing.

“Abandoned you?!” Gray questioned, looking towards his large flaxen haired partner in bewilderment. “I thought Elfman took you home?!” At this Elfman just shrugged.

“She was gone already, when I went lookin’ for her…” Elfman answered, as Cana rounded on him with her finger out and pointing.

“Well hell yea! You guys were takin’ forever and I wanted to know what the heck went down! That was not a ‘little thing’ that happened last night! I know it was more serious than that, so start talkin’ Gray!” Cana demanded, as Gray ran a hand through his dark hair in frustration.

“Are you serious? Right now, Cana?! You came to OUR meeting for this?!” Gray asked in aggravation.

“Well, that wasn’t the only reason… But yea! You’re damn well right, that it was definitely part of it!” Cana replied, with some serious attitude, as she folded her arms. “So, start talking…” She added impatiently, looking down at him, as he sat and she stood. Gray paused glancing around the room at everyone in question, but for some reason they all seemed interested now.

“Go ahead Gray… You were gone all night, last night and all day, today too… As your chief, I want to hear this now, as well…” Erza chimed in.

“Ugh… Fine… I figured Elfman told you… but…” Gray moaned, his shoulders lowering. “Some guy, basically got his face beat in… That’s all… It really wasn’t a big deal.” Gray added, trying to stay cool. “He wasn’t dead… Surprisingly… Although I can’t say it was something I’ll ever forget seeing, now that I have seen it…” Gray paused as he glanced down for a moment. Then he looked back up towards Erza. “Doesn’t matter though, because I had to hand over the case to the other Station, anyways… Due to jurisdiction…” Gray explained. “It’s actually Ichiya’s case now…” The mention of the distinctive detective’s name, made Erza grimace in displeasure.

“Well hold on Gray…” Elfman interjected, something just occurring to him. “Remember the victim…? The card? It was Twilight Ogre… Again…” Elfman added.

“Oh, right?!” Gray exclaimed, looking back to Erza. “That’s why Elfman and I were surprised, when you mentioned the warehouse money being for them.” Gray explained. “We seriously just saw Banaboster’s name on a business card, in our victim’s wallet, last night!”

“Wait a minute… What?” Now even Erza seemed surprised. “Who was the victim…? Do you remember the name…?” Erza asked in puzzlement, her interest piqued.

“Yea! Thinault Winchell… I had actually seen him at the Casino before… Well, before he got his face smashed in, that is… He was an ugly, lanky looking fellow.” Gray explained, as Erza’s eyes widened. “What…? Do ya know the name…?” Gray asked, once he noticed how she was looking at him.

“Yes…” Makarov suddenly answered, as all eyes were now on him. “We do know that name. Thibault, is the man who works directly under Banaboster… The fact that you would mention something happening to him, on the same night that Natsu burned down the warehouse, with their money in it… It’s uncanny… Almost too much so, to be considered a coincidence…”

“Well don’t look at me…” Natsu replied. “I had nothin’ to do with that one.” There was another few seconds of silence and it was almost as if you could hear the sound of wheels turning, inside each
one of their heads. Erza brought a hand to her lips in contemplation, before finally speaking.

“Thibault was supposed to have been there this morning for the transaction… With Banaboster… My informant mentioned both of their names… I’m sure of it…” She muttered.

“Then who else would have beaten him up, if it wasn’t one of us tryin’ to screw with em?” Elfman questioned.

“Is it possible the guy just had a lot of enemy’s?” Cana asked. “Why can’t it just be a coincidence…?” She added with a hand settling over her one hip, as the other was up in question.

“Thibault has a reputation for being a disgusting, perverted man… There’s been suspicion of him being involved in a few sexual harassment and/or rape claims, but the women involved, never seemed certain… As they were often drugged and had a hard time remembering their attacker… So, I suppose it is possible, that his supposed deeds, may have finally gotten him into trouble, but there really is no telling…” Erza replied.

“Could one of Jose’s own be responsible for taking Thibault out…?” Mira asked, making everyone turn to her in question.

“No…” Gray answered. “Now that Erza mentions the possible rape charges and such… That makes a lot more sense… A lot of blood was found, in the women’s restroom that night, at the club… And that was actually the whole reason why we were there to begin with…” Gray explained, as he scratched the back of his head. “Then we just… Found him there, in the parking lot…” He finished with a shrug, as Erza looked up at him again. This time her arms were folded

“Now hold on a minute Gray…” Erza interjected earning his eyes.

“Which club did you say you guys were at…? Because I also did hear word of Jose’e associates possibly having a meeting to finalize the details of today’s transaction, somewhere last night… We weren’t certain of course… As we didn’t know who was holding it on Jose’s end… But Banaboster’s name did come up…”

“The Celestial Night Club…” Elfman, Gray and Cana all spoke in unison, causing Erza to pause and close her eyes. Her fingers were once again going to her chin.

“I thought so…. It explains Thibault being there…” She spoke, her eyes opening. “But… That doesn’t necessarily explain much else, unfortunately… As I can’t foresee a member of Jose’s origination, wanting to do something like that… It would just further harm Phantom’s relationship with Twilight Ogre… And I can’t imagine Jose wanting that, unless they had some kind of conflict going on, that we are not aware of… I doubt that though, because he was using them after all…” Erza explained, leaving them all to once again sit there and wonder for a few minutes in silence, until finally Makarov spoke.

“Erza.” Makarov addressed, gaining her attention. “See what more your informant can find out, then report back to me.” Erza nodded in understanding, her mind thinking back to how, he had mentioned a meeting to her, on the phone. She was praying he’d have something useful for her, after hearing all of these new findings. “For the moment, we can’t rule out anything, but we also can’t do anything, until we know more…” Makarov stated, looking to Natsu in particular, as he said this. “Do you hear me Natsu?! I’m going to allow you to stay in on this a little longer, because I believe that your heart is in the right place… But don’t you dare act again, until I tell you!”

“Yea, yea I hear ya gramps, I get it!” Natsu replied, his hands going back behind his head.
“I mean it! No more fires!” Makarov snapped. “For now, just concentrate on school and stay out of trouble, until I tell you otherwise!” Makarov added, his eyebrows coming together in frustration. “I promised your father I’d look after you and you’re making a liar out of me! I don’t appreciate it!”

“Okay jeeze! I get it old man!” Natsu answered back. “Stop worryin’!” Makarov sat back in his chair at that, his face was calming and his small arms were folding.

“I will when you stop giving me a reason too…” He muttered with eyes closed. He opened them again and looked around, at all of their faces. “We can’t afford to make any more mistakes! Keep your wits about you and pay attention! We will find a way to do this, without falling to Jose’s level! We have to! And so, we will, it is as simple as that!” Makarov spoke, addressing the whole room now. His eyes then landed on Cana. “If you are here, then you are with us! And that means, that I can trust you, just as I trust your father…” Makarov told her, making Cana nod.

“I promise! I’ll be of use…” She replied with a weak smile, but worried eyes, as if she didn’t wish to disappoint him.

“I don’t doubt that child… But keep what you’ve learned, to only the people in this room…” Makarov advised as Cana nodded again, her smile becoming more confident. Makarov glanced away, taking in all of their faces once more. “Well then… Until the next time we meet! Remember… If we pull together, there isn’t anything we can’t do!” His fist came down on the table. “That is the Fairy Tail way!”

With the last of Makarov’s words, there were a few cheers and smiles exchanged, amongst the small group of people. Then slowly, they all started to file out of the office, as he stayed put in his chair and watched them go.

Gray had slipped on his white T-shirt and was carrying his uniform, besides Elfman. They were both chatting, about how ready they were for some sleep. Mira was handing all of them their coats, as they each walked out the door. Erza was gathering up the metal item she had brought in and Natsu was quickly on her heels, as she walked out the doorway. Mira was the only one who actually stayed behind with the Master, closing the door, once they had all exited the office.

“Well done… Master…” She praised, as she turned to face the old man. There was a beautiful smile over her face.

“What are you on, about…?” He questioned, while clearing his throat as if disinterested. He then glanced away.

“Oh you know…!” She chimed in response. “For accepting Cana and for keeping Natsu in…!” She added, her head tilting. “That was very kind of you…” She praised, earning a sigh from the old man.

“Or very foolish… I tell you Mirajane… That boy is going to be the death of me…” He sighed again, referring to Natsu as he turned his chair away, but Mira just laughed lightly in response.

“Surely not before Laxus, Master!” She added in jest.

Back in the hallway, everyone listened for the sound of Makarov’s heavy door to shut, as they headed on their way out from the meeting. Natsu was quickly trying to catch up with Erza, who was walking rather fast with the object once again, tucked under her arm.

“Ey Erza! Where ya taking that…?” Natsu called after her, in confusion. Erza paused after hearing
him. She then turned to eye him from over her shoulder.

“That is none of your concern, now.” She answered lowly. Her voice held a hint of warning to it, meaning not to question her on the matter and so Natsu immediately backed off.

“Fine… Whatever.” He answered, somewhat offended. He then stepped back as Erza just ignored him and continued on her way ahead.

Natsu stood there a moment, his black eyes watching the people before him as he recounted everything they had just gone over in the meeting. There was one piece of information specifically, that was nagging at him, the more he tried to forget it. Finally, after a few more seconds of pondering the matter, he jogged ahead, to catch up with Gray and Elfman before they could board the elevator.

“Gray! Elfman! Wait up!” Natsu called after them, causing them both to hesitate with the elevator door open. Cana was already inside, whereas Erza had opted out and decided to take the stairway door, off to the side instead.

“Ya guys coming?” Cana asked impatiently with a raised eyebrow.

“I don’t know… Just hang on, okay?” Gray replied, as he had put on his uniform shirt and coat again, in preparation for the cold air outside. He turned to look at Natsu running and waving towards them, from down the small hallway. “Whattya want Natsu?! I’m freakin’ tired!” He snapped. Elfman folded his arms behind him.

“Yea, a real man needs his rest and we haven’t gotten any yet!” Elfman added, just as Natsu had arrived in front of them.

“I gotta ask ya somethin’” Natsu explained, as he looked from Elfman, to Gray.

“What is it..?!” Gray asked in annoyance.

“Well move! I’m not waiting for you idiots!” Cana announced, as she pushed Gray’s arm out of the way of the elevator door, that was trying to shut. All three of them stood there and watched, as the doors shut and it began to move down without them in it.

“Man… Gone again, just like last night… Talk about, impatient…” Elfman muttered. Gray let out a long drawn out sigh, as he turned back to Natsu with great irritation.

“Alright! Ya made me miss my ride now, pyro. So whatya want?!” Gray snapped. Making Natsu’s eyebrows come together in anger, but he managed to hold his tongue, as he had more important things to ask.

“I wanted to ask you about this Thiba- Tyvol- or whatever the hell his name was!” Natsu answered, his words clumsy, as remembering names had never been his strong suit.

“Thibault.” Gray corrected, his arms folding. “Yea… so? What about him?” Gray questioned, trying to get straight to the point.

“Well… Ya said his face was beat in…”

“Right… Completely.” Gray replied, his tone becoming less irritated and more cryptic sounding.

“When you say that… Do you mean like-?” Natsu began, trying to find the right words.

“Look, it was bad.” Elfman suddenly spoke up, interrupting them. “We don’t know what caused it,
but it looked like some kind of weapon was used.”

“Yea… His jaw was shattered, his eye sockets… It’s the kinda thing, I wish I could forget…” Gray started to say, but then he stopped, because he didn’t want to continue.

“Okay I see…” Natsu replied. “Ya don’t need to say anymore.” He added, as he could see that they didn’t wish to be reminded. “That’s all I wanted…” Gray looked up at Natsu in confusion.

“Do you know who could have done it?” Gray asked in curiosity, as he watched Natsu glance down. His eyes looked far away, as though he were thinking. Finally, after a moment, he looked back up and matched eyes with Gray.

“Not a clue…” Natsu answered. “Sorry.”

Gajeel had just pulled into a parking spot right in front of a building, that rested along the port side of town. He put his bike into neutral, before turning the key so that the engine could roll to a stop. His foot pushed the kickstand down, as he glanced up at the place before him. It was a hut, nestled along the pier and it had been modeled to look like it was made out of the same kind of wood on the outside. The windows were dark, basically black, allowing nobody a look inside and there was a large wooden sign that said, ‘The Shark Tank’, sticking out of the tiled roof.

It was dark outside now; the sky had blackened and Gajeel could just make out the faint blue outline of the sea, just beyond the building. It would have actually been hard for him to see if it wasn’t for the one lone light, shining down over the dock-like ramp, that was the entryway to the hut.

Gajeel let out a visible breath due to the cold, while eyeing the door from his spot on the bike. Luckily, he was at least wearing his leather jacket now, he had finally managed to get that back, when he had gone to retrieve his bike. On top of that, he was also now sporting a pair of, brown leather, fingerless gloves. They were ones he often used for riding.

Gajeel begrudgingly lifted his leg over the bike with a groan, before quickly pocketing the key into his coat. Juvia had been right, the ride over had been somewhat painful for him, but it hadn’t been anything he couldn’t endure. The creaking of wood was sounding off, as each wave was crashing into the pier far below his feet and he could smell the salt clinging to the air.

His mind was already drifting back to Levy before he could even hope to stop it. A slight smirk was forming over his lips, as he imagined how she would scold him for being reckless while injured. His large boots were thudding over the wood loudly, as he reached the door; his walking was relatively normal now. He also felt much better after finally having time to wash up carefully, without getting his stitches wet as ordered and having gotten a fresh change of clothes.

Gajeel opened one of the large wooden doors, only to be faced with another set of heavy black glass doors. Just behind them, he could see the distinctive glow of pink and blue. The smell of fish was invading his nostrils as he opened the second set of doors and stood in the entryway of the dark room.

It had been a long time since Gajeel had set foot in here. In fact, he was pretty sure Juvia hadn’t ever frequented it before, and so it made him wonder why they were even holding the meeting there to begin with. He glanced around taking in his surroundings for a moment, if only to jog his memories of the place. It looked relatively the same as he remembered, just smaller and more cramped, as he was much bigger now, compared to the last time he had seen it.
The whole room was modeled to look as if he were aboard some old-fashioned boat, as far as decoration was concerned. Wooden walls, anchors, fish mounted like trophies, but it was also very dark inside, because the main sources of light mostly consisted of several large aquariums mounted within the walls. They were very impressive looking ones too, with full-scale environments, that were very reminiscent of the ocean. Some of them nearly took up whole walls of the building, as well. One was even built into the wall just behind the bar, with shelves and everything intact. They weren’t empty tanks either; there was a large array of different underwater fish inside them, all kinds of different saltwater types.

It was a seafood bar and restaurant. One of Jose’s and surprisingly enough, not that well known despite its awesome display, because of the ghetto area it was located in. A shady district along the docks, mostly used for importing, but Gajeel knew that was most likely how Jose preferred it, considering what all he used it for.

Gajeel’s eyelids came to a close, as he stood there trying to gather his bearings, that was until he heard his name being called.

“Gajeel…!” Came Juvia’s voice as Gajeel turned and glanced up to see her standing up from one of the booths, located over to one side. She slowly walked towards him, as he kept a steady eye over her. Outwardly, her expression looked calm, but Gajeel noticed the subtle signs of her discomfort as she approached. “I am pleased to see you…. I was waiting, hoping you’d show up soon… I don’t know where to go… I am unfamiliar with this place.” She uttered, her tone rigid.

Gajeel glanced up and away from her at this. He knew she was uneasy; he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t, even just a little himself, but he wasn’t about to show it to her. He didn’t want to worry Juvia anymore than he already had, that day.

“I’m familiar with it… But it’s been a long time…” He answered darkly, turning away. “C’mon follow me.” He added, as Juvia followed suit.

Juvia noticed Gajeel’s walking seemed better than it had earlier, or perhaps he was just getting used to the pain? Maybe he had taken something for it? She could only be left to wonder, as she followed just behind him, through the restaurant. That was until her mind was pulled off of him, to instead take in the beauty of one of the many pink glowing aquariums, they were passing by. Her eyes were following, the mesmerizing movement of a school of fish, as they swam right in front of the glass, in perfect unison. She may have been more inclined to watch more, if she wasn’t so nervous about why they were there.

The place was relatively empty, with only a few patrons at the bar and a couple of more settled amongst some of the tables and booths. Trouble was, Juvia couldn’t help, but notice, that all of these people looked familiar to her too. They were mostly just faces, that she recognized, because they also worked under Jose and she had seen them at some point.

Finally, after going through the small dark labyrinth that was the restaurant her and Gajeel came upon a door that was just off, to one corner of the building. Gajeel pushed it open without hesitation, despite the sign that read ‘staff only’. It took them into a very narrow hallway that was a tad bit brighter, until it finally opened up on one side. This entryway led to the kitchen and Juvia was able to steal a glance into the brightly light room, as the chefs slaved away inside. She was able to see several cutting up and preparing fish for the next day, as both her and Gajeel continued on past it.

Then finally the two of them came upon the final door at the end of the hall, this being the part where Gajeel decided to hesitate. Juvia could hear the sound of knives cutting and the chefs talking in some
other language that she could not distinguish, as she looked up at her taller friend. He was staring at the door before them, with a peculiar and far away expression over his face. Her eyes shifted off of him and to the door with uncertainty.

Gajeel meanwhile felt stuck, as he continued to hesitate over what he should do next. His eyes were narrowing on the door and he just couldn’t get the question out of his mind. Why here… Of all the places? It had been so long… But it couldn’t have been a coincidence, that Jose had picked this place… No, if anything, it seemed more like a passive aggressive threat…

“Do-Do we knock…?” Juvia suddenly questioned, interrupting Gajeel from his thoughts as he looked down at her. He paused for a moment.

“I’m not goin’ to.” He finally mumbled, making Juvia swallow nervously as Gajeel’s gloved hand settled over the knob and he pushed the door open, in front of her.

Juvia waited for Gajeel to stalk in first, before she filed inside right behind him. The room they entered, basically looked like a rectangular shaped office that was empty of most everything, but a big crescent moon shaped, desk in the center, positioned near the far wall. There was an empty chair, with a very tall back, just behind the desk. The room was dark, like the rest of the restaurant, the only source of light being, by far the largest fish tank she had yet seen, mounted within the far wall, just behind the desk. It was like looking into a giant blue window, to the sea.

Juvia paused within the threshold of the room, just to stop and stare in awe, as the door closed behind her, because among all of the swimming fish was a good-sized shark, gliding into view just behind the glass. She watched with wide eyes, until it disappeared out of view of the window.

Gajeel had taken a few steps just over to the right of the door, only to take up residence in that corner of the room. He stopped to turn and look at Juvia, who was still standing there, frozen in place, staring at the aquarium window.

“Oi’ Juvia…!” He spoke, eyeing her with folded arms. Just then, as Juvia heard her name, she noticed he had moved away from her. But that was also what led to her finally noticing, that they were not alone in the room.

The others were already there and waiting. Sol was standing to the right of Aquarium, in the opposite corner of Gajeel. And Aria was planted in front of another door, that Juvia hadn’t even noticed in the corner; diagonal from the one, Gajeel had chosen.

“Pourquoi Mademoiselle Juvia !” Came the light voice of Sol, in greeting towards Juvia, who bowed her head subtly in response.

“Hello Monsieur Sol…” She replied calmly, before turning to move and take her place right beside Gajeel.

“So tis’ tru!” Sol replied as he watched her. “Still preferring the company of dis’ brute!” Sol uttered as he made it a point, to show that he was eyeing Gajeel, through the monocle over his right eye, but Gajeel paid him no mind. In fact, he didn’t even bother to so much as glance, in Sol’s direction. Which of course, only encouraged the strange man all the more, as he flamboyantly made his way over to where they were standing.

Sol was a strange and unsettling character, who had been working for Jose far longer than Gajeel or Juvia, as he was much older. He had a long thin body, that was also creepily tall, and it made him
appear almost noodle-like in appearance. His lengthy, stick shaped arms and legs, only helped to aid in this look, as well as his strange way of moving. His torso and arms would often rock back and forth, while his feet glided almost seamlessly across the floor, in an eerie manner. His head was oval shaped and his face was long, with a tiny mustache. His hair was a dark green and spiked upwards, the shape and color resembling that of a pine tree.

He was of French descent, which was obvious from his distinct way of speaking and use of both languages. His line of work mostly consisted of in-house information extraction, or in other words ‘torture’, but he wasn’t limited to just the physical aspect of this either. No, if anything, Sol prided himself in his ability to mess with his victim’s minds, all while inflicting them great external and internal pain… And like most of Jose’s associates, Gajeel did not like him, not one bit.

Gajeel watched, as Sol stopped just feet before him. His head was nearly level with Gajeel’s own as he matched eyes with him. The feelings of hatred between the two of them, were indeed mutual.

“So, if isn’t monsieur Gajil!” Sol greeted in mockery. “No! Brute Gajil!” He then corrected, as Gajeel just stared back with narrowed eyes. “Is been a long time since you’ve been here, Gajil… No…?” Sol questioned as a smug grin was forming over his face. “Oh, les souvenirs!” He suddenly exclaimed, as if excited, his head and torso were moving back dramatically, as they so often did. “Brings them back, no?” He questioned next, as his head came back up, to face Gajeel. “Fond memories, oui, oui!” He added making Gajeel’s jaw clench in frustration. His arms were beginning to stiffen at his sides.

“Get outta my face…” He muttered darkly, between clenched teeth as Juvia looked from Gajeel to Sol in alarm.

“Ah Oui!” Sol uttered again, his smirk only growing. “Terror Gajil returns! Always angry! For seulement un monstre ne ressent aucune douleur!” Sol exclaimed, before his voice then lowered to an almost dangerous tone. “But those scars must tell a different tale Gajil… Peut-être qu’ils piquent quand vous revenez?” Sol questioned next. He was speaking in French purposely, so that Gajeel wouldn’t understand him, rightfully setting him on the path, to pure spite.

“I told ya to, back the hell off!” Gajeel raged. He was just about on the verge to attack, when there was a loud noise from Aria’s side of the room. They all turned to look, only to the see the giant of a man, sobbing like a lost child.

“So sad! It’s so sad!” The man was blubbering. “What happened here that day!”

“Oh, shut the hell up!” Gajeel snapped, this time towards Aria. “The only thing sad, is listenin’ to a full-grown man cry!” Aria sniffed a few more times, after this but said nothing in retort.

Aria was a large fellow, bigger than Gajeel, both in stature and width, as his shoulders were very wide and square, which made his head look almost small, in comparison. His skin was also of a darker, tanner looking complexion, when compared to Gajeel’s. His chin was boxed shape and long, like the rest of his face. He had a set of prominent, chiseled cheekbones, as well. He was normally always wearing an old-fashioned boulder hat, that left Gajeel to wonder, if he even had any hair. He also normally wore, long flowing coats and a pair of rounded dark shades, over his eyes, even in dark places such as this, and at night. Gajeel had always suspected this was, because the man seemed to cry… A lot… And this was his way of covering up his red, blotchy eyes.

Despite his peculiar display of, out of place emotions, Aria was a man of great intimidation. Not only for his size, but also for his reputation. He was mostly known for being Jose’s main bodyguard, as he rarely left his side, but his skills were also far too good to waste on something as trivial as protection. And so, on occasion, Aria did leave Jose for certain missions that Gajeel really had little to no
knowledge about, and he was quite fine with that.

There were some things about Jose’s business, that Gajeel purposely stayed ignorant about, and this included most everyone else’s work for the man, but his own. Jose had a certain style, in the way he liked to conduct his dealings, where if he needed to do it elsewhere, somewhere that he didn’t consider ‘his territory’, then he would often send Gajeel in his stead. This was mostly because, he didn’t wish to be seen, or associated with the people and places he was sometimes doing business with, publicly. Especially if he was going to need to muddy his hands, in the process. He knew he could depend on Gajeel to act as needed and carry out any dirty work, that might need to be done to a certain extent. And… If there needed to be something more done, then he also knew he could depend on Gajeel to bring said, ‘business’ back to him, where he could oversee it personally, behind his own closed doors if needed. Once it reached this point, the job was seemingly out of Gajeel’s hands and knowledge, so he would often times, just let it die away from memory.

The good news was, Aria’s tears seemed to have the desired effect on Sol, as he had finally backed off of Gajeel, and wandered back over to where he had been standing, as the room grew quiet. Meanwhile Juvia, was keeping her eyes on Gajeel and he could feel her stare digging into the side of his face, as he tried his best to ignore her. She was questioning him and he knew this, even without having to hear her say the words, but he couldn’t answer her. Not here, not vocally, or visibly and he didn’t desire to either. It wasn’t something he wished to talk about, as he was quite over the past in every way, but still… He couldn’t get over the fact that Jose, had chosen this place and the why…

Just as Gajeel was once again pondering this, the blue light that surrounded the room suddenly tinted a vibrant glowing, red. Everyone glanced up to the tank, to see a swirl of bubbles and scarlet ink its way over the window, within the water. It was a massive amount of blood.

Gajeel stared at it with wide eyes; he could hear Juvia gasping slightly beside him, in great alarm. It was just then, that the door Aria had been standing by, opened, and out came Jose himself, peeling off a pair of bloody white gloves, as he marched towards the desk, with a wide smirk over his lips. He threw the gloves into a garbage can, and then stepped up, just behind the crescent moon shaped desk.

“My apologies for being late... I was just feeding the sharks…” He spoke in a confident, yet conniving voice.

He knows… Came Gajeel’s thoughts, as his eyes landed over Jose’s smiling face. Totormaru told… This... This is a threat…

Gajeel’s mind was panicking, as he already knew Jose was doing this, as a way to intimidate him, specifically. No... Came his thoughts again. Maybe it’s not quite that yet… More like a warnin’…

Gajeel’s eyes narrowed. But it Is, directed at me... Came his thoughts, as he finally understood why Jose had chosen this location. He glanced back over to the door Jose had just walked out of, his throat drying, but otherwise he tried to remain outwardly calm.

“Well, well, my friends…” Came Jose’s voice as he leaned forwards, both hands settling on the desk, as a flourish of red slowly began to dissipate back into blue behind him. “We have a few things to discuss.” He exclaimed, his smile only widening, allowing his lips to take up most, of his narrow face.

The creases in his forehead were very distinguishable due to his age, as well as the lift, in his already
high towering eyebrows, as he raised them even still, a bit further, in false delight. His slick, dark, red-brown hair, was tied back, into its usual ponytail, allowing the shape of his oval-like head and rectangular shaped jaw, to easily be seen. He was wearing a fancy blue trench coat, with cuffed sleeves as his beady eyes did a once over, of everyone’s faces before him. “I can see we are all here, so let’s get started…” He announced, his voice was building lowly, in fake anticipation, his smile never wavering with each word. “Aria…” He called, his head looking towards the large man, still positioned over by the door he had entered from.

Aria marched forwards; his enormous hands were reaching into the pockets of his coat, as he came to stand right beside Jose. Then he pulled out, what appeared to be a crumbled-up piece of paper, which he seemed to have trouble unrolling, as it was a bit beat up from being in his pocket.

“So it seems…” Jose began. His words were coming across as calm, but there was a bit of bite behind them, as he dragged out certain parts solely, for emphasize sake. “Our business dealings with Twilight Ogre… Are now a thing of the past… After certain events that took place this morning.” He paused, his eyes gliding over all of three of their faces, as he straightened up. “It took no less than 24 hours, mind you…” He paused again. “So, to begin, I will ask… Does anybody know what this is…?!” Jose concluded, with his voice raising and a finger pointing at Aria.

The giant of a man, had finally managed to unfold the crinkled paper and display it, for all of them to see. He had one hand holding it open from the top and the other holding it open from the bottom.

Sol, Gajeel and Juvia, all had to move in closer, to see what appeared to be a drawing, done in black marker, because it had been hard to make out from far away, in such a dark room. Once close enough, Gajeel’s eye began to move over the flowing shape of the drawing, in confusion. He was quickly realizing that it looked familiar to him. Then his heart practically stopped beating, once he understood why.

Levy…! His mind uttered her name internally, as his mouth fell open in surprise.

It was her! But no… Not her! Her tattoo! Gajeel could recognize the odd shape, that Levy had referred to as the ‘tail’, of the fairy, even if Aria’s shitty drawing did it little to no justice, in how elegant it had actually looked on her back.

“What… What is it…?” Juvia was finally the first to speak, causing Gajeel to steal a frightened glance in her direction. His heart was pounding, as he was sure he was the only one in that room, that knew what it was supposed to be… Or at least he was hoping that was the case. Jose looked back to her, his smile had disappeared and his face took on a more menacing expression, at last.

“We don’t know.” He answered simply; his voice was inflated in frustration. He had stopped leaning on his desk and stood up straight. “But it is part of the reason why Twilight Ogre is no longer associating with us.” Jose’s eyes glanced over to the drawing and then rounded back, onto all three of them. “This morning was to be the end of a very crucial phase, in our dealings with Twilight Ogre… They were to receive a very large payment from Phantom, as part of a contract we made with them, a while back… They were to carry out certain services for us, that we needed in return…” Jose’s arms were folded. “Problem is… They didn’t receive the payment!” Jose spat, his arms unfolding so that his hands could violently gesture towards the drawing. “Thanks to this!” He added, as his hand slapped down onto the desk in front of him. “All of the months we spent planning and working with them now, mean nothing, because of it!” He finally finished; his eyes were practically sparking with anger.

Gajeel stared at Jose in contemplation; his studded brow was lowering in confusion, he was beginning to sweat. Part of the reason he had, had to go to the meeting at the club the night before, was because of the transaction Jose was referring to. The one that was supposed to have, happened
this morning and although he could understand how his attack on Thibault might have caused an issue with this, what he couldn’t understand was how Jose seemed to know about Levy… He had been positive, that he had just managed to keep her out of every bit and piece of it, but if he hadn’t…?!

What the fuck was he gonna do now?! He felt like his heart was jamming up into esophagus and it was almost hard to breath. His eyes were becoming glossy as he stared at the drawing, unable to move. It all made no sense! That was until Jose’s voice continued.

“Are warehouse was burned down!” Jose announced, taking everyone aback with this news. This snapped Gajeel out of his panicked state, just long enough for him to look at Jose with his studded brow stretched back, in question. “The warehouse with all of Banaboster’s money in it! Someone!” Jose was shouting. “Burned it to the ground! And this!” He pointed, his finger slamming into the paper. “Was what was left there!” His hand gestured towards it. “This symbol! Clearly… It is some sort of calling card, for a group… Or a person, whom we can now consider our new enemy!” He explained in irritation, his body leaning against the desk again.

Gajeel’s eyes were widening at this revelation, his worry being put aside for more confusion. Someone was leaving that… As a calling card? Someone was burning down their warehouse, trying to mess with Phantom’s business? None of that, had anything to do with what had happened between Levy and Thibault, or his beating Thibault up, to a bloody pulp!

*Wait a second… Fires…Starting fire’s as a means to get in the way…?* Gajeel’s thoughts were speaking. Although it had been a while… It was all just beginning, to sound a little too familiar.

“And so, I’ll ask again… Does anyone have any idea what this symbol means or who it might represent…?!” The room was silent, as Jose was met with blank faces. He then straightened back up, his arms folding and his eyes closing. “Well… Very well, then… If you three don’t know, then I guess I’ll need to address it to everyone else in the organization… But…” And then he paused, opening his eyes to look them all over, once more. “There is something else…” He added and Gajeel couldn’t help but notice how Jose’s beady eyes, seemed to linger over him in particular, this time.

The moment of judgment was upon him; he had known all along that this was still coming. There was no getting out of it.

“On top of the fire, there was another incident with Twilight Ogre, that prompted their leave… One of their men was ruthlessly beat up and left for dead…” Jose’s eyes stayed on Gajeel as he said this, and Gajeel didn’t move or show any outward emotion at all.

Instead, he just met Jose’s oncoming gaze with his well-known, stone walling stare. One he had perfected ages ago, while he was still a kid. It wasn’t normally difficult for Gajeel to keep his composure in any situation, come fear or pain, but throwing Levy into the mix, did seem to throw him off his game, just a little.

Right now, he was starting to think that it wasn’t, as he originally thought. That she wasn’t actually involved, despite the symbol and that Jose hadn’t any idea of her existence at all, and so he felt clam once again. There must have been something more about the meaning of that image, that Gajeel didn’t yet know about.

“Thibault Winchell.” Gajeel stated, before Jose could say another word and this caused a large grin to form over Jose’s face, as their eyes stayed locked together. Juvia was stiffening, as she looked up to Gajeel in bewilderment. She couldn’t understand why he was coming forward and she was becoming deeply frightened for him, so much so, that her face was paling.
“Gajeel…!” Jose addressed Gajeel in praise, his smile dangerous. “I can see that you already know about this.” He added in mock surprise, his voice was gleeful in tone. Sol was also smirking, although he too, was surprised. His expression was reminiscent of someone watching a well-awaited boxing showdown. Aria hadn’t budged, other than to set the paper down on the desk. He seemed uninterested in the events that were unfolding, as he stood there like a brick wall next to Jose.

“It was me.” Gajeel stated without hesitation. His voice held no indication that he was even concerned, let alone afraid to admit it. Jose’s eyes stayed on Gajeel and then his smile vanished, as one of the large sharks swam into view just behind him.

“I will need all of you to leave the room, now. Gajeel and I have something to discuss, alone…” Jose spoke, addressing them all, as his eyes never wavered off of Gajeel’s face.

Then with almost no pause, the others began to take their leave calmly, but quickly. Juvia turned to look up at Gajeel, but he refused to acknowledge her back, making it clear, that his mind had been made up. Her sights fell downwards in worry and her fingers graced his one arm gently, as she began to brush past him, towards the door that Aria was now holding open for her. Gajeel did one small glance down at her, once he felt her move away, but otherwise he didn’t move. She sent him one last look from over her shoulder; her eyes glistening in helpless concern, before stepping out. She hadn’t expected him to just come out and say it like that, and she could feel her body growing cold and tense as the door shut behind her. She couldn’t do anything for him now…

Gajeel’s eyes shifted downwards, as he waited for the sound of the door to close. He hadn’t moved, instead he just glanced back up at Jose, who was giving him a very displeased frown. The same shark was still swimming just behind him, causing a shadow to move over Gajeel’s face, as the two stood in tense silence.

So long as he doesn’t know about Levy… Gajeel’s mind was echoing, his arms clenching at his sides. Then everythin’ will be fine… He told himself in confirmation, allowing a breath to seep out through his nose, his eyes closing.

“Gajeel…” Jose stated as Gajeel opened his eyes again. “I don’t think I need to tell you where your actions have led us.” He spoke, his words calm, but also loud, like he was on the verge of yelling.

“I understand.” Gajeel replied.

“Then why…?” Jose demanded, his eyes narrowing. “You understand that it was this, on top of the fire… How do I know that you weren’t involved in that as well, Gajeel? Your loyalty may be in question, after this…” Jose added, his words like venom, but Gajeel remained unfazed.

“Thibault dug his own grave…” Gajeel stated, making Jose raise an eyebrow.

“You have my ears boy… Go on…” Jose replied with interest, despite still looking displeased.

“He stuck around the club after are meetin’ last night.” Gajeel began, thinking back to his first run in with the lanky man, at the bar. “I told em’ to leave. I gave him a warnin’, saying I’d tell Banaboster, but he didn’t seem to care, even though he had somewhere to be the next morning.” Gajeel explained, his words firm and void of all emotion, as the memory of him removing Thibault from the barstool came to mind. “He got shitfaced.” Gajeel spat, his brow lowering, as he then remembered how Thibault had later approached him about Levy, with an empty drink in his hand and everything that
had happened after. “He came after me, cause he was sore… Sore about me tellin’ him what to do.” Gajeel explained, his mind drifting back to the fight in the parking lot. “He threw some punches, but he didn’t like bein’ put in his place.” Gajeel continued, as he remembered Thibault’s uppercut to his own jaw. Thinking about it, made the muscles in his face cringe a little in memory, but he then pictured his retaliation and how he had punched the man in the gut, right after. “He pulled out a weapon he had been hiding…” Gajeel explained, as he could hear the echo of Levy’s voice, screaming in warning. “And he stabbed me with it, in the leg.” Gajeel finished, as he remembered the feeling of the knife plunging into his skin. He then glanced up at Jose, whose eyes had widened greatly. “And so, you can see sir…” Gajeel began. “I couldn’t let him get away with that…” Gajeel’s stare was unmoving, as it pierced right through Jose’s own. “Thibault was a reckless idiot, who couldn’t be trusted… We’re better off without him, in the mix.” Gajeel stated firmly, sticking to his own story like his life depended on it. It was surprisingly easy, because he wasn’t lying, he was just keeping the parts about Levy completely out.

“I see…” Jose began. Now there were two sharks, swimming into view behind him. One of them appeared to be eating something. “I was told that Thibault’s face is unrecognizable. I’m surprised… I didn’t know you had that in you, Gajeel…” He spoke, his tone inflating up, almost as if in praise. “You could have just as easily killed him.” Jose added, he was now smiling as he said this.

“I didn’t want it to go that far, for the very reason we are here now.” Gajeel answered. “I should have reigned myself in more-”

“No.” Jose interjected, making Gajeel’s eyes perk up, as the man turned around to look at the blue window, his eyes following one of the sharks. “If what you are saying is true, then Thibault was an enemy of ours, of Phantoms.” He stated, his hands were wringing together behind his back. “I wouldn’t expect one of my own, to take that from one of our enemies… Especially you Gajeel.” Jose added, as his head turned, so that he could eye Gajeel, from over his shoulder. “Next time I give you permission to finish the job... No matter who it is…” His voice was deep and his face gravely serious. “We mustn’t tolerate traders or incompetence in this organization.” He continued. He was now fully turning around to face Gajeel again, as his head lowered and his eyes closed. “How do you think this organization has managed to stay afloat, for this long?” He questioned Gajeel, expecting no answer in return, as he looked back up at Gajeel’s stoic expression. “And I trust you Gajeel. Your loyalty has never been in question before…. And that is why I need to ask you about something else, as well…” Jose began. Gajeel had been expecting this and so he waited patiently for Jose to continue. “There was evidence left at the crime scene?” Jose asked, making Gajeel nod in confirmation.

“A phone.” Gajeel stated and this is where the lying needed to begin. “But I was able to get it back.” He explained.

“Yes…” Jose replied, as he turned away once again, but the sharks had disappeared from view. “Totomaru mentioned you guys running into a little trouble with that.”

“It was more like a misunderstanding on his part.” Gajeel spoke, in a slightly frustrated tone. He wondered if Juvia’s name was going to come up now, but surprisingly it did not. Perhaps Totomaru had chosen to leave her out of it, because he seemed to have a fondness for her and a hatred for Gajeel. The other good news was that, even though Totomaru had known about the phone, he hadn’t known who it belonged to, or where it had been found, seeing as it hadn’t been his case.

“Was it yours?” Jose questioned.

“Yes…” This made Jose raise an eyebrow.

“I don’t understand... Is the burner phone not good enough for you, Gajeel?” Jose questioned, with
“I just wanted somethin’ for personal use…” Gajeel explained, “But I got rid of it after this whole thing… Too much of a hassle, fer what’s its worth… And it’s not like I got anyone to contact anyways…” He explained. “I lost it during the run in with Thibault… And once I figured that out, I went to Totomaru for help in gettin’ it back from the cops, so that I couldn’t be linked to the whole thing…”

“I see… Hmm… It’s not like you to be so sloppy, Gajeel…” Jose replied, making Gajeel smirk.

“Well I suppose there’s a reason I don’t need things like that, then…” He jested. “Not when they cause mistakes, that wouldn’t normally happen, to happen… Gihl.”

This made Jose grin; he had a fondness for Gajeel. He kind of viewed him as the son he had never had, and that was why he was inclined to trust him.

“Well, I suppose you made the right choice then… But… Without Twilight Ogre’s involvement I’ll need to find another way… And more importantly… I’ll need to find out who is targeting us…”

“Well I suppose you made the right choice then… But… Without Twilight Ogre’s involvement I’ll need to find another way… And more importantly… I’ll need to find out who is targeting us…”

“About that sir… I might have an idea of who it could be…” Gajeel chimed, gaining Jose’s interest.

“You know what this could mean…?” Jose questioned, gesturing towards the drawing still on his desk.

“No… But I might know who the arsonist is… Although it’s been over a year, so I had kinda thought, I was done dealin’ with him…” Gajeel explained, making Jose fold his arms.

“Do you know where to find this person Gajeel?” Jose asked.

“No… But I might be able to lure him out.” Gajeel explained.

“Then I leave it to you, Gajeel… We need to know, who our enemies are… So this takes immediate priority.” Jose ordered, as Gajeel smirked at him.

“No problem boss… I’ll get right on it, startin’ now…” Gajeel stated as he began to turn away and head towards the door.

“Oh… and Gajeel…” Jose uttered, causing Gajeel to hesitate with his hand over the doorknob. He turned to look at the man, who was grinning madly at him. “Bring him back here, for me…”

“You got it.” Gajeel replied, before turning away and leaving out the door. Jose watched Gajeel leave, his grin disappearing as the shark swam back into view behind him. Aria then walked back into the room and closed the door, walking forwards.

“I sent the others home.” He stated to Jose.

“Good.” Jose replied, as Aria stopped just before the front of the desk.

“Is Gajeel going to be a problem?” Aria questioned, Jose brought a hand to his chin, pondering.

“I have no reason to doubt him… His story seems to fit with what Totomaru reported. He mentioned being stabbed in the leg, which Totomaru had said, he had a wound there…” Jose explained. “But still… There might be something more he isn’t telling us…” Jose turned away to once again watch the shark. “As it stands, I need him… Especially if he knows anything about who is targeting us and
until he gives me a reason to doubt him…”

“Even now, that Twilight Ogre is out…?” Aria questioned.

“Don’t worry… Aria… That bastard Banaboster, won’t be getting away from our deal that easily…” Jose explained, as he turned towards Aria. “You can’t just walk away, when you’re in this deep… Gajeel had it right, in the way that he handled a traitor.” Jose stated, his voice heavy and then he turned his head back towards the tank. “If he continues to impress me, then there might just be hope for him yet… The Phantom Organization does need an heir after all…” Jose added. His beady eyes were moving in rhythm with the shark, until it swam out of view.

Gajeel had just stepped back outside, into the cold air and he was breathing it in, glad to finally be out of that place. For a moment, he had almost wondered if he wasn’t going to get to come out, while still breathing. He closed his eyes as he could still hear the sound of waves; it was calming to him, which he needed, because he was still a bit on edge from the whole meeting.

The fact that Jose had shown that symbol, greatly disturbed Gajeel and he just couldn’t get his mind off of it. He was too worried about what it might mean for Levy, to forget, but luckily Jose hadn’t shown any indication that he knew any more than what Gajeel had told him.

Salamander… Gajeel’s mind spoke, as his eyes narrowed into the dark ahead. Was it you…?

“Gajeel…” Gajeel paused, as he heard his name being called from a distance.

“Juvia…?” He questioned, slowly walking forwards down the ramp, his feet thudding the wood with each step. He finally could see her, as she stepped more into the light. She had been waiting for him by his bike, despite how cold she was. Her body was shivering slightly and her eyes were boring into him, like she might cry. Now that he got a look at her face, he wasn’t actually sure if it was the cold that was making her tremble, or if it was fear. His eyes widened, as she came towards him quickly and caught him off guard, with a hug.

“I didn’t know if you were going to come back…” She spoke into his coat. Gajeel had his arms out like he didn’t know what to do, as she was embracing him. Then finally, she pulled back, a tear in her eye. “I apologize….” She told him, as she looked up at his surprised face. “I was very worried…”

“Oh, C’mon Juvia…” Gajeel spoke, as he stuck his hands into the pockets of his coat. “You should know better, than that… Jose wouldn’t-”

“Don’t say that…” Juvia interjected, her voice shaky and on the verge of tears. “Don’t lie Gajeel…” She shook her head, as she looked down. “I have been around long enough, to know better now… Working for Jose has made me begin to notice things, that you have probably always known about… Like… For example…” She looked back up at him, her eyebrows crossing in determination. It was almost as if, she needed to summon up the courage, to say what she was about to next. “Whatever happened to Bora…?” She asked, out of the blue.

Gajeel’s eyes were widening on her and he suddenly felt like his throat was closing up.

“We were together…” She continued timidly. “And then we found out he had been using me to steal from Jose…” Juvia explained, as her head looked back down.
"Why the hell are you wastin’ yer time worrin’ over someone like him, Juvia! He’s scum! Who care what the hell happened to him?!" Gajeel snapped, earning her eyes back on him.

"So, then, you do know something about it, Gajeel…?" She questioned, making him freeze once more.

Gajeel didn’t know what to say, because in truth, he really didn’t… All he knew was that he had handed Bora over to Jose, as ordered, after roughing him up a bit, for revenge on Juvia’s account and then… He hadn’t known what had happened to the man from there and he had never really found out either…

"Did you know that I tried to confront Bora about it…?" Juvia asked, making Gajeel look at her again, as he hadn’t spoken. “But then… I never heard from him again…” She paused; her words were slow and cautious. “I went looking for him, for a bit, but… I never found him… It was like… He just vanished…” She paused, Gajeel could see her hands fidgeting together, as she continued. Clearly her nerves were just as shot as his, if not more so. “And he’s not the only one I have noticed, Gajeel… He was just the first…” She added with a shaky voice. Her head and eyes stayed downwards. “All of this… Whatever happened to him… I can’t help, but feel like it was my, fault…” She uttered, her voice heavy, like she might cry. “That Jose may have done something to him… May have killed a man just, because I was so happy to have finally found someone… And too blind to see, what he was really using me for…”

"Rain woman…” Gajeel seethed. “Just… Stop.” He uttered next, with an uncomfortable voice. He didn’t like hearing her say things like that. He never had, and he had never been the best at comforting people either, not even Juvia. He just wasn’t good with words.

"Gajeel… Please…” Juvia begged. “Tell me, what does he do to people…?" She asked, as she finally looked up towards him. “Tell me what happened on that day… The one Aria was referring to…”

"What…?" Gajeel questioned, his eyes were widening.

"Seulement un monstre ne ressent aucune doule.” Juvia spoke the words in French, that Sol had uttered earlier. “Only a monster feels no pain.” She translated. “The scars Gajeel. Peut-être qu’ils piquent quand vous revenez…” She added, uttering the other bit. “Maybe they bite when you come back…?” She questioned, after translating the second half. “The two of them, Aria and Sol… Were both going on about something, that happened there… To you…” She said, her eyes lowering to the arm, that she knew was heavily scared, beneath the sleeve of his jacket. “Something, you never told me about…” She added.

"Juvia…” Gajeel growled her name in warning. His eyes were closed and his teeth were clenching. Right now, he was really wishing Juvia wasn’t so perceptive. “This… We can’t talk about this.”

“But Gajeel…”

"Shut the hell up!” He growled again, his eyes opening as he shot her a blazing stare. “Stop asking questions! Yer better off that way! I don’t ask fer a reason!” Gajeel barked, trying to keep his voice down.

"What about Levy…?" Juvia suddenly questioned, making Gajeel practically spit at her in frustration, for saying her name out loud, in such a place.

"What about her?!” He asked, as if completely irritated.
“There’s a reason you don’t want him to know…” Juvia explained, getting angry herself, the tears still pooling in her eyes. “There’s a reason, you want to stay away…” She whispered.

“Yer damn well, right!” He stated. “And you promised you woudn’t say anythin’ so I’d appreciate it, if you shut the hell up rain woman!” Gajeel raged, as he stared down at her, like the beast he was. Unfortunately, intimidating Juvia, just wasn’t possible. She had no reason to fear him, nor would she ever.

“Gajeel…” She spoke his name softly. Her eyes were boring into him, like she felt sorry for him and that just pissed him off, all the more. He needed to get away from it, from everything she was trying to make him confront.

“Now move aside rain woman! I’ve got work ta do!” He finally growled, with gritted teeth. His large boots were marching forwards past her, out of the light, to where his bike was parked.

“Gajeel wait…” Juvia called after him, as she turned to look.

“What Juvia…?” He questioned in anger, as he was now standing before his bike away from the light. His body looked like a large shadow monster, in the dark.

“What are you going to do now…?” She asked. Gajeel slowly swung his leg over the bike and stuck his key inside the slot as he looked up towards her.

“Move on…” He replied, but he could see Juvia frowning at him, over his answer.

“But… You…” But she was interrupted by the noise of Gajeel’s bike, that had come roaring to life. He smirked at her and it made her just shake her head and fold her arms, as she looked at him with a roll of her eyes. Then just like that, he was driving away, before she could even say another word.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that to yourself…” Juvia uttered softly, with a faint breath on the wind, as she watched him pull out of the parking lot.

Levy was sitting curled up on her bed, comfortably adorned in her pajama pants and a tank top. Her back was pushed up against two pillows, that were resting against her headboard as she sat there, with her glasses on and her hair free flowing around her face. Her eyes were steadily focusing in on the book, she was holding in her lap.

This was all she had been doing to pass the time, simply reading for enjoyment. She knew it wasn’t a wise choice, not when she should have been studying instead, but she found this to be a much better way to calm her frazzled nerves. And she had very much needed the escape.

The room was very quiet, now that she was alone. The lighting was dim, as she just had the one lamp over by her bed on. The studio was picked up for now, as she had decided to dedicate a good amount of time to cleaning the place up. She had needed the excuse to move around and do something with herself, right after Juvia had left, just to get her mind off of things. She could feel herself growing tired though; as it was now well into the night, at this point.

Levy reached over to grab a bookmark from the table beside her bed, thus marking the page she had stopped reading on. She closed the book and set it aside on the table, before eyeing the phone that had been sitting on the charger for a while now. The screen was glowing again, reading the time and signaling that it had come back to life as Levy then reached for it, taking it off of the charger.
Her eyebrows were coming together, as she entered the four-digit code and finally got her first true look at the screen since Juvia had brought it back to her. There were many missed calls, some text messages and a few voicemails as well. Some were from Jet and Droy, but most of them were from Lucy… Leaving Levy to feel immediately guilty. Most of the text messages read something along the lines of, ‘Levy I am worried about you… Call me when you get this…’

*I better call her now…* Levy thought, as she glanced at the time, seeing that it wasn’t too late, because Lucy should have just been getting out of work. She began to pull Lucy’s number up from her favorites list.

Lucy was walking home to her apartment in the cold night, after a long-jam-packed day of things to do, per usual. Her feet were aching, as she tightly pulled her long coat around her body more securely. She had just left work and was still wearing the strange attire that was her uniform; an old-fashioned black and white maid outfit, that she didn’t like at all. It was too promiscuous for her taste, even if she did look cute in it, but it was what her employer preferred for the girls to wear.

Lucy could feel herself blushing with a cringe, as she thought about the creep, but at least he paid well. And for the moment, she wasn’t really in a place to argue, as she needed the money, badly. Unfortunately, it also made walking home for her a bit uncomfortable, as she didn’t wish to be seen by anyone dressed like that, especially in the middle of the night. And although her coat was long, it did nothing to cover the high sexy stockings, that were over her legs.

Her chocolate eyes were glancing down, as a breeze made the skin of her nearly bare legs, fill with goosebumps. Loose strands of golden hair were flying over her face and getting in her way, as she had let it back down, once her shift was over. Her mind was shying away from the creep, that was her boss, only to dwell on her pink haired co-worker in his place. For some reason, Lucy’s odd co-worker seemed to enjoy the ridiculous get up… Although Lucy couldn’t really consider that girl to be normal either, seeing as she was always going on about strange forms of punishment, like a masochist or something…. Lucy sighed in remembrance of the weird conversation they had, had that day.

Today had been rough and stressful… Why if it hadn’t been for Loke that morning, making Lucy feel significant for once, she wasn’t sure how she would have made it through. Her phone had been ringing all day and not once had it been either of the two people she had been dying to hear from, Natsu or Levy. No, instead, it had only been her father, calling to harass her. So now, she was spending more time screening his calls rather than answering them, but it wasn’t about to last, because she was on the verge of losing it and letting him feel the full brunt of her breakdown.

Lucy was just coming up to the door of her building when, as if on cue, she felt the vibration of her phone in the pocket of her coat. The blond wasted no time, not even bothering to look at the name on the screen, as she immediately ripped the object out of her pocket, hit the button and pushed it up to her face.

“LOOK! I’M NOT DOING WHAT YOU WANT, SO JUST STOP CALLING ME!” Lucy screamed, her anger basically exploding into the speaker of her phone, as she could no longer stand it.

“Uhh… Lucy…?” Uttered a timid and confused voice, on the other end.

“Levy!” Lucy gasped in astonishment. “Oh my god! You finally called! I have been worried sick, about you!” Lucy exclaimed in alarm, meanwhile leaving Levy to feel incredibly guilty on the other end. “What the hell?! Where have you been?! Why didn’t you call me back?!” She questioned next in a panic. “I thought something happened to you!” Lucy was crying out, leaving Levy to take a
blatant moment of silence, because she knew she would now need to lie to her best friend.

“I’m sorry Luce…” Levy uttered with a light, yet fake laugh. “I… uh… Kinda lost my phone…”

“Oh!! Well jeeze! No wonder!” Lucy replied, as she began walking up the stairs. “I was wondering why I hadn’t heard from you! But that explains it!”

“Yea…” Levy laughed again.

“So, you gotta tell me Lev, what happened last night?! I’m dying to know!” Lucy spoke next, barely giving Levy a chance to breathe. Lucy had just arrived on her floor and was walking towards her door, as Levy pondered what Lucy could possibly mean. Did she already know something?

“Oh… I’m not sure what ya mean…” Levy replied in return, as Lucy had started to unlock her door.

“Ah… C’mon Levy… Don’t give me that…! I know ya went home with someone!” Lucy exclaimed, as she had the phone pressed up against her ear with her shoulder. She had just begun to open the door to her room.

“Uh What?!” Levy spat, in clear alarm.

“Yea! Come on, Cana saw you!” Lucy explained as she closed the door behind her and glanced around. She immediately noticed something was off, the lights were on.

“Cana saw what, exactly…?!?” Levy was questioning into Lucy’s ear, as the blond slowly began to walk forward into her room. She was no longer paying attention to the phone, by her head.

“Uh… hang on Levy…” Lucy muttered, her voice quieting, as she stepped forwards cautiously.

“Wait Lucy..!” Levy was exclaiming, just as the blond quickly rounded the corner of the entryway, to her room.

Levy meanwhile, was waiting on her end of the phone, her cheeks red, as she demanded answers in confusion. She was panicking a bit now, after hearing this revelation about Cana and so, she wanted answers. She hadn’t any idea what was going on, but she suddenly heard Lucy yell from over the phone.

“LUCY KICK!!!”

“Lucy!?” Levy screamed into the phone, but then all she heard was the loud clanking sound of the phone, clearly being dropped.

“Oww! What the hell was that for!??” Came a familiar loud voice, making Levy’s eyebrows lower in question.

“Natsu…?” Levy questioned, with a raised eyebrow.

“Well what the hell are you doing?! Barging in here, when I’m not home! You very nearly scared the life out of me, you idiot!” Levy heard Lucy’s shrill shouts in the background and she couldn’t help but smile a bit, in humor.

Well... Looks like he’s finally come over to see, Lucy… I’m glad... She has missed him. Levy was just thinking, as she heard the sound of Lucy picking the phone back up.
“Sorry Lev! Can I call ya back... Or... Are you going to bed...? Can we just talk tomorrow at school...?!” Lucy asked.

“Uh... Yea sure... Let's do that.” Levy replied. That will give me time to think of something. She thought.

“Okay great! See ya tomorrow morning, Levy! Goodnight!” Lucy chimed.

“Goodnight Lucy...” And just like that, the line went dead. Leaving Levy to sit there and stare at the phone for a moment, in confusion. She then slowly set it aside, back on her night table, before pushing her legs under the covers of her bed.

“So... Cana knows...?” Levy wondered out loud to nobody, as she laid back down. “What could she possibly...?” She questioned, her eyes staring up at the ceiling for a long minute, but then, “Urghhh!” She was screaming into her pillow, as she pulled it tightly over her head. Once she got her frustration out, her fingers softened their grip over the fabric. She let out a moan as the pillow fell away from her face and she was once again, staring up at the ceiling.

Gajeel... I wonder what you would do in this situation... Since you don’t like to lie either...? Her mind questioned, as she closed her eyes and began to picture his smirking face.

Lucy had just clicked ‘end’ on her phone, as she looked down at Natsu who was sitting Indian style on the floor, and rubbing the back of his head where she had just kicked him. She watched him for a moment; his eyes were averted elsewhere, as she took in the details of his face. It had been a long time since she had actually seen him in the flesh, or at least it had felt like it had been a while. Maybe it was, because up until recently, she had been used to seeing him every day. She could feel her body tensing with despair, as she thought about this. Her head was lowering, as all of the emotions she had been feeling lately were coming forward.

“Natsu...” She uttered softly, making him finally shift his glance up in her direction. His face was adorned with a frown, as if he were pouting. Lucy lifted her head a bit; her large eyes were glossed over, once they landed over his face. Natsu’s head jetted back, once he got a look at her. “Where have you been?!?” She exclaimed on the verge of tears.

“Uhhh...” Natsu began, his head lowering in shame; he was once again rubbing the back of his head as he looked away.

“Lisanna and I were both, so worried about you!” Lucy added as she pushed a hand over her eye, to keep from crying. “I didn’t know what to think!”

“Look I know...” He finally answered, in a deep voice. His eyelids were lowering. “I'm sorry... Okay...? I just... I just had some things to take care of...” He replied, looking back towards her, his face serious. “I wasn’t tryin’ to worry you... So please... Don’t cry.” He requested.

Lucy’s hand dropped back down, away from her face, as she stared at him. The two of them locked eyes for a moment, as she took in the demeanor of his expression.

“I won’t...” She finally answered gently, her eyes shifting downwards. This made Natsu begin to smile at her and for some reason, she could feel her own lips curving up as well, as she stared at her own feet. Natsu always had a way, of bringing her strength for reasons she didn’t even fully understand and so with him there, she felt like she could handle it all. Natsu was getting to his feet, his hand coming up to slap down on her shoulder.

“Good... Now tell me what’s been goin’ on!” He demanded with a large grin towards her. Lucy’s
head snapped up, to look at him, her cheeks reddening as she remembered her night with Loke.

_Do… I… Tell him about that..?_ She wondered, as he took his hand off of her, to rest against his side. He was still smiling at her and Lucy was dawning him with an unsuspecting look. _Probably not…_

“I heard you’ve been havin’ a hard time!” He explained.

“Oh… Uh… It’s just my dad… Wait a minute… Natsu… Did you go and see Lisanna?” Lucy then asked and he just smiled.

“Not yet…” He looked away, again. “I called her, I was gonna pay her visit after I stopped here and saw you.” He replied.

“Oh, I see… Good… Cause-Hey! Wait a minute!” Lucy exclaimed, as if she had just realized something. “You don’t have a problem calling her, before you just show up, but with my place, you gotta break in, without warning?!” Lucy suddenly yelled.

“Well, I haven’t figured out how ta do it at her place, yet!” Natsu answered as he gestured towards the window. “She doesn’t have an easy to access window, with a fire escape like you do!” Natsu explained as he folded his arms and Lucy just shook her head.

“Remind me to get a lock for that…” Lucy muttered as she turned away from him, Natsu just raised an eyebrow at her.

“Lucy…” Lucy turned back to look at him. His expression looked serious now, his eyes were closed, but then he opened them. “Tell me what’s been going on…” He finally said. Lucy looked at him for a moment, before her head lowered with a weak smile appearing over her lips.

“Okay…” She answered gently.

Erza had just entered the door to her loft and was pushing it closed behind her. She was holding the metal fairy tail symbol that Natsu had left at the fire scene, with the tarp still snuggly wrapped around it; it was tucked under her one arm. She then bent over, to set it down and rest it against the wall, before standing back up straight, to lock the door. She kicked off her shoes and then turned away, not bothering to pick it up again, instead she started taking off her gloves and shoving them into the pockets of her coat. She took her coat off next and started walking further into the room, still not bothering to turn on the lights.

She was tired and was getting ready to head towards her bedroom to change. She could see pretty well through the dark, due to the great amount of moonlight that was seeping in, through her large bay window. Leaving the shapes of crisscrossing windowpanes across the floor and walls of her main room. She threw her coat down over the sofa, as she made her way towards the hall.

The main room was large and open, set up like a living room on the left with an open kitchen off to the right. The large window was directly across from the entryway. There was a small dining room table off to the right, between the kitchen and living space. The narrow hallway was just off to the right of the window, where her bedroom, bathroom and linen closet were.

Erza was making her way down the hall, while taking off her dress jacket and revealing the black, tight fitting turtleneck she had on, underneath. It was made out of a silky-smooth elastic-like material, almost like under armor with short sleeves. She pushed open a door, the last one on the right, as this was her bedroom. She stepped inside and walked forwards, towards the edge of her queen-sized bed, then she stopped.
Erza stiffened up, her sights darting to the right and then her whole torso swung around towards the other body, that was suddenly coming at her. She grabbed the arm with both hands tightly and then swung the person away, out from behind her, with all of her strength, gritting her teeth with a growl as she did so. She saw the back of his legs collide with her bed, but he kept his balance, as she came towards him with her fist back, for a forwards attack. He was able to catch her wrist, his other hand going for her shoulder, as he pressed all of his weight into her. Her fingers were clawing into his ribcage, as the two of them struggled, his weight pushing them into her wall, with a loud thud.

Erza’s back hit the drywall, as the intruder held her one wrist up against it and beside her head. He was then able to capture her other wrist and do the same thing with it, as he moved in close, practically on top of her. She was still gritting her teeth, as she wrangled both of her hands beneath his much larger ones. Her dark eyes moved up towards his face, a smirk forming over her lips.

“Now, that was a dirty trick… Attacking me from the side, I have trouble seeing on…” She uttered, as she stared fiercely up, into a set of dark brown eyes. The rest of his face was covered with a green handkerchief. There was also a dark snow hat concealing much of his head and hair.

Slowly the man let go of her one wrist and eased off of her just a little, so that he was able to bring his hand up and pull the fabric over his face down. He was smiling at her between a pair of devious lips, but he was made to look safe by the gentleness, that his eyes carried. His pale face was attractive, despite having a red facial tattoo that stretched from his forehead, down to his cheek, over his right eye. Its design was intricate, like it was meant to be a symbol for something. He had a few inches over Erza, as he looked down at her, his eyes holding to her own.

“Sorry…” He replied in a soft voice. “But I feel like normally, you don’t mind when I play dirty.” He added, as he reached up to push the hat off of his head. Revealing long strands of blue hair, as the hat fell to the floor.

He then took up her other wrist again, gently, as Erza had ceased all movement and was now willingly, allowing him to do as he pleased. He bowed his head slightly, towards her and Erza found her cheeks warming, as his lips pressed against hers, without hesitation. He was bringing her wrist down between them as he kissed her, smiling against her and Erza found that, she no longer had any fight against him, because she had wanted the kiss, just as much as he had. Instead, she was now leaning up to meet him as they held to each other’s lips with longing. Her heart felt like it was flying on air, as it always did every time they kissed… Because she loved this man and she had missed him dearly.

They pulled apart and looked at one another, he was still smiling gently at her, while she just looked up at him, like she was lost.

“Jellal…” She began as she lowered her sights off of him.

“So, are you going to tell me why you were thinking about me, today…?” He interrupted, referring to their phone conversation from earlier that day. She looked back up at him, her eyes widening, as she remembered the couple she had seen earlier that day, and how she had imagined that being him and her, someday… And how she knew it never could be.

His name was Jellal Fernandes, he was a man who had once served time, but had been released, only to once again, be wanted again. He had a history of working with different crime rings in the city, but he also had a history with Magnolia’s chief of police, unbeknownst to everyone else. He was her criminal informant, as well as her secret lover, but they could never be more than that, due to Jellal’s complicated past. In fact, nobody could know who he was, as he would then be arrested again. So, for the moment, they gave each other what they could, and there was no one person Erza trusted more. She could feel a smile forming over her lips, as if to tease him.
“I don’t think about you…” She answered, her head shifting.

“Is that right…?” He questioned and his head was lowering again, towards her. “Well, that’s too bad… Because I can tell you…” He spoke gently, his lips lowering by her ear, as his one hand was coming up and caressing the hair on her other shoulder. “I’ve been thinking about you… So much lately…” He whispered and Erza could feel herself beginning to tremble, at the feeling of his breath. He was the only man who had ever had such an effect on her; she was normally too strong willed otherwise to act in such a way.

“Jellal… Tell me why, you’re here…” She spoke in a light voice, making him slowly lift his head and pull away, just before he was about to kiss near her neck. He looked her over, his hand was now on her cheek, as she held his gaze. His thumb swept over her skin and he smiled gently, again. She looked serious and so, he knew what that meant. Business before pleasure, and his hand fell away from her face.

“Twilight Ogre is done with Phantom. For good.” He answered, getting right to the point, as he stepped away and gave Erza some room.

“Oh… So Natsu’s little stunt, worked…” She replied in wonder, her fingers gracing her chin.

“So, it seems… But there was also mention of another incident invol-”

“Involving Thibault… Yes, I know…” Jellal looked at her, his expression stoic.

“Wish I could say I was surprised, that you know that already, but somehow I’m not…” He answered.

“Do we know why, that happened to him…?” Erza asked. “Or who did it?”

“No… Sorry.” Jellal replied, his eyelids lowering. “It seems I’m going to have to find a new source of information, because I’ve about bled out, all that I can from the current.” He added.

“Jellal…” Erza spoke, earning his eyes back on her. “Do you think, that it is possible… That it was one of Jose’s own…” She questioned and he paused, as if considering the possibility.

“Implying as if, one of them has gone rogue…? I can’t see why it couldn’t be… Jose does have a way of rubbing people the wrong way… Banaboster was already ready to be done with him, before all of this happened.”

“It is because, he is too dangerous…” Erza stated. “Once people realize that, they don’t want to be involved anymore…”

“Yes… Problem is… There’s no way out…” Jellal told her. “Once you’re under Jose’s thumb, you’re either stuck there… Or you’re dead.” Jellal added, his voice cryptic. Erza shifted her head away from his dark expression; her teeth were coming down over her thumbnail in contemplation.

“We’ll need to keep an eye on Banaboster…” She spoke.

“I will get right on that…” Jellal answered, with a step towards her again. She turned back towards him, as he came close. “Tomorrow… But in the meantime…” He spoke, his head coming near hers again. His hands were moving to her sides, as he brought her to him and kissed her once again.
Gajeel had just moved his leg over the bike with a groan, after a long ride. He felt stiff, as he began to walk forwards over the gravel. He was a lone figure, as he made his way between warehouses. It was well into the night and he only had the light of the moon to help him see his way, but luckily, he knew the path. His hands were tingling from all of the cold air, that had just been blowing on him during his ride, so he had them shoved into the pockets of his coat.

Finally, after what felt like forever, because of the pain in his leg returning, he had reached a large clearing. Well, it was kind of a clearing in the sense that, there was no longer a warehouse there. Instead it was just a taped off area, full of ash filled wreckage. It was all that was left from the fire that had ensued earlier, that morning. Gajeel began to walk around it and position himself off to one side, where he would be hidden from view should anyone show up. He found himself a spot on the ground, where there was bit of grass and took a seat, prepared for a long night ahead.

*And now I wait… They say arsonist always like ta return to the site of their disasters, just ta see the damage they have inflicted… And I know that includes you… Salamander… Gajeel’s eyes narrowed. And you can bet… His fist was squeezing tight in anger, brass knuckles adorned. I’ll be gettin’ some answers from you…!* He thought, as he punched at the ground. His mind picturing the lovely site of Levy’s white tattoo over her back, all while she slept peacefully.

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**A/N:** Below I wrote a few more fun things about the chapter and possible hints about what's to come!

**Monster FYI's:**

- The two in the opening were Alzack and Bisca- Which I hope was obvious! I love them; they are the most adorable little family along with their daughter!

- Fairy Tail is the name for Makarov's group, because the word has meaning to them and only them, so thus, it is like a code, only the members of that group understand and know.

- Makarov kinda took over raising Natsu after Igneel was gone. I will be going into a little bit, about what happened to Igneel, but even more so Gajeel's father.

- Yes, Natsu does suspect Gajeel… He knows Gajeel as Black Steel, but he doesn't know who Gajeel works for. Nobody really does, except for the people who have worked closely with Jose like Banaboster and Thibault.

- The Shark Tank is based off of some restaurants my dad used to work on growing up under the ‘Landry's Seafood Chain’. One was a fancy place called The Dock, which was a seafood restaurant, that had an aquarium, built like described. It was located in downtown Cleveland, but later become a Joes Crab Shack. Then there was one called 'The Aquarium' – I think they still have that in Texas! That location is important to Monster, so that is why I gave it character.

- I was using 'google translate' for the parts with Sol, so hopefully they are right! I apologize if they aren't! He's a really tough character to tackle ya know? I honestly feel like I'm just kinda winging it with the characters of Phantom, but I need them!

- Totomaru does like Juvia! Why…? Because it is convenient for me and that's the only
reason... So that way he won't get her into trouble, like he did Gajeel. Well at least not yet... I don't know if this will come into play for future use at all or not. If so, it won't be overly critical, but I'll have it there, in case I need to use it.

-Jose was not feeding the sharks people or anything... Just fish, but who's to say he doesn't feed them a part or two, from time to time? Who knows?! He did time it though, so the others would see some of the carnage on purpose. It was indeed a threat aimed towards Gajeel! This is partially why I chose the chapter title to be 'Omen'... There are a few other reasons...

-Gajeel only has a burner phone for work, since he really only has the two friends and his job... He never needed anything more. But say should he ever have a tiny... adorable girlfriend... It might make reaching him a bit difficult.

-I will be explaining Juvia and Gajeel's past eventually... Like how they met and why their close, simply because... I want to, and I think it will be nice to delve a little more into their characters.

-Sorry Levy didn't get much time in this chapter, the next one will be starting with her though and revolving around her and Gajeel.

-Lucy's co-worker is Virgo and her boss, I kinda imagined to be Everlue... But I didn't want to get too much into it, because it isn't important. What's important is, she has a job and cleaning is just what I came up with, because I didn't want hers to be the same as Levy's.

-Lucy and Natsu's part was included for a little bit of closure and, because again- those two are important to the plot. There was a detail or two included that could end up being very important later on.

-I'm sorry, but I'm totally team jerza... Hope that's okay with you all... Jellal seemed like a good candidate for a spy and I needed one of those!

-Gajeel just doesn't know how to take it easy and that could end up costing him...

Thanks! That's about all I can think of for now!

BTW You guys are so AMAZING! Thank you for being such lovely patient readers! I'm going to continue to try my best in hopes that you will all be entertained. Thank you for reading Monster.

Chapter End Notes

Show me how to lie
You’re getting better all the time
And turning all against the one
Is an art that’s hard to teach
Another clever word
Sets off an unsuspecting herd
And as you step back into line
A mob jumps to their feet
Now dance, fucker, dance
Man, he never had a chance
And no one even knew
It was really only you
And now you steal away
Take him out today
Nice work you did
You’re gonna go far, kid
With a thousand lies
And a good disguise
Hit ‘em right between the eyes
Hit ‘em right between the eyes
When you walk away
Nothing more to say
See the lightning in your eyes
See ‘em running for their lives
Slowly out of line
And drifting closer in your sights
So play it out I’m wide awake
It’s a scene about me
There’s something in your way
And now someone is gonna pay
And if you can’t get what you want
Well it’s all because of me
Now dance, fucker, dance
Man, I never had a chance
And no one even knew
It was really only you
And now you’ll lead the way
Show the light of day
Nice work you did
You’re gonna go far, kid
Trust, deceived!
With a thousand lies
And a good disguise
Hit ‘em right between the eyes
Hit ‘em right between the eyes
When you walk away
Nothing more to say
See the lightning in your eyes
See ‘em running for their lives
Now dance, fucker, dance
He never had a chance
And no one even knew
It was really only you
So dance, fucker, dance
I never had a chance
It was really only you

With a thousand lies
And a good disguise
Hit 'em right between the eyes
Hit 'em right between the eyes
When you walk away
Nothing more to say
See the lightning in your eyes
See 'em running for their lives

Clever alibis
Lord of the flies
Hit 'em right between the eyes
Hit 'em right between the eyes
When you walk away
Nothing more to say
See the lightning in your eyes
See 'em running for their lives

“You’re Gonna Go Far Kid” By The Offspring
Blood

Chapter Summary

Levy has a dream concerning Gajeel and the burden she carries. Levy breaks down over the trauma she endured and the loss of her family. Lucy tries to have it out with Levy, but Cana is the one who ends up getting to speak to her, with a warning. Jellal and Erza get to have a 'moment', before getting down to business again, with a new plan in the works. Gajeel finally jumps the man he had been waiting for, but is caught off guard by the knowledge his target possess, and is then hurt in the process. Gajeel makes his way home, with the haunting memories from his childhood to accompany him. Levy makes her way home, when a sudden memory hits her. Reality comes crashing, 'quite literally', down to the ground in front of her.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 12: Blood

Levy stood there, her eyes fixated on the man who was sitting before her on the edge of the bed. His legs were hanging off the side, his bare feet planted on the wooden floor. He was wearing the same clothes, belted pants and a black short-sleeved T-shirt. He was holding a coffee mug in his one hand up near his face; it was the very same coffee she had made him. The one he had left abandoned on the table beside her bed. His red eyes were smiling arrogantly at her in much the same fashion as his lips, that familiar smirk spreading across his face. And Levy found that she couldn’t move while locked in his sights, too stricken with the disbelief that he was actually there with her again.

“Why ya got that look on yer face…?” Came the deep rumble of his voice. “It’s like ya ain’t ever seen me before, shrimp…” He added, his smirk stretching into a full out, fang-revealing grin.

“Gajeel…” Levy was finally able to utter, with a slight tremble of her lips. “You’re here! I didn’t think we’d…”

“Tell me…” He interjected, before she could say another word, her eyes widened. His grin was fading into a frown, as he lowered the coffee cup down between his legs; his eyelids were falling shut gently. His head was angling to the side as if he didn’t wish to continue, but he did, regardless. “Levy…. Are you afraid…?” His tone was deep and somber as he asked this.

“What…? No…!” Levy gasped, as her hand reached up towards him. Her eyebrows were coming together in sad confusion, over the idea of him asking such a question. “Why… Why would you ask me that?” She brought her hand back up to her chest, her fingers curling over her heart, as she glanced down. “If anything… I’m glad… I wanted to see you again.” She spoke, her eyes darting back up to meet his. “I wanted to know that you were okay…” She added, her voice desperate.
“Are ya sure bout that…?” Came his next question, as Levy just looked up at him with misunderstanding. He was staring her down and then, “Look.” He ordered, as his free hand came up and he pointed to something behind her. Levy froze, she could feel the dip in her heart and then it was as if her body just moved, a force of its own volition.

She whipped around and there stood the large shadow of a man, towering over her. He had glowing red eyes and a raised armored fist, smothered in blood. His teeth were clamped together, his fangs protruding out over his bottom lip. His studded brow was low as he glared down at her, with an antagonizing expression over his face. The muscles in his arms were rigid and ready to strike at a moment’s notice, should she make the slightest wrong move. He was the very definition of a fiend, standing before her like the gatekeeper to hell.

Levy’s eyes were widening, a slight shiver from the draft of his darkness was coming over her as she stared up at him, unable to move. The air was stuck in her throat and she was literally choking on the words, almost as if his mere presence was death sucking the life right out of her, with his steely glare.

“Gajeel!” She finally managed through a gasp.

“Black Steel.” He corrected her, with a firm growl. Levy could feel herself wincing at the hiss in his voice. Her arms were moving up to the defensive position, should he try and attack, but she didn’t dare run away, she stood her ground.

“I-I know that!” She finally managed back in response. Her eyes were closing from the power of her own voice, as she screamed through her fear. “So, don’t… Don’t you dare…” Her hand came up and she pointed at him. Her eyes opened, the anger was taking priority over her face. “Act like, I don’t see it!” She snapped back in desperation, unshed tears had formed in her eyes. She was unwilling to run away from him, but she couldn’t hide her trembling. “I am not naive Gajeel!” She finished in a rattled voice. Her emotions were going haywire, she was lost somewhere between being afraid, worried for him and angry over everything that he was saying to her. And it showed in her every action, it could be heard through her every word.

“Yer better off this way Levy…” Came the voice of the other Gajeel, still sitting on her bed. Levy turned to look at him, “You know that.” He stated with finality in his tone, his head was bowed. “Or do ya want somethin’ like that to happen again…?” He asked.

His voice was heavy with the weight of warning, as his gaze shifted back up. His stare was piercing right through her with such intensity, that Levy was left with nothing to say. Her mouth fell open, her glossy eyes were deadlocked to his face and she wanted nothing more than to move. She wanted to go to him, she wanted to grab his shirt and demand answers, maybe hit him, or even hug him, but she found that she was unable to budge, her shock too evident.

That was until she heard a groan of agony, from just behind. She turned around once more and there stood Thibault, pulling a large bloody knife out of Gajeel’s stomach, the suctioning sound of the motion was sickening. He then whipped around to face her, but Levy was too busy watching Gajeel.

She screamed at the sight of him falling to his knees in severe pain. Then he slumped over with a pain filled groan, his eyes were open, but the life was draining from them. Like a tiny flame suffocating from the lack of oxygen, their glow eventually fading out for good.

Levy’s mortified stare shifted from Gajeel’s dead face, up towards Thibault who was standing over the body. There was a large grin over his lips; his beady eyes were drinking in her horrified expression with greed. He was holding the knife up by his head; a finger was coming over his lips.
“Shhh…” He hushed gently as he took a step towards her. “Now now…”

Levy was taking a few steps back, but then she tripped over her own feet, landing on her rear and hands. She moved back, but her back was against a wall that hadn’t been there before. She was confined once again, just like when she had been in the tiny bathroom stall, at the club. Thibault was hanging over her, with his long gorilla-like arms stretched out, the bloody knife in his one hand.

“We’re already here…” He uttered, but something was wrong.

His face looked different, like it was becoming distorted and broken, right before her very eyes. Levy could hear the sound of bones breaking and snapping, the horrible crunch of it all, as it deformed. It was like his face was melting into mush.

“Can’t stop now.” The blood was spitting from his broken mouth, as he spoke the gurgling and seething words. The shattered bones of his jaw were stretching and tearing at the skin of his face, pieces of it sticking through.

“No please!” Levy was begging, crying in horror. She turned away from his nearing form. She couldn’t bear to look any longer, her eyes were slamming shut as she braced for the impact of his knife, her body against the floor.

Levy’s eyes opened slowly, her body laid still, her head resting over the pillow. She could feel the heavy heave in her chest, as her body recovered from the stressful and horrific nightmare. She slowly moved her small frame up to a sitting position; her head was hanging with surprising calmness.

The sweat was lining the rim of her tank top; her hair was clinging to her neck. Her skin felt clammy and her body was stiff with exhaustion. This was the third time she had woken up from a strange dream and it was making her so tired, that her head was pounding. She hadn’t been able to get any real rest that whole night.

Levy turned her head towards the window, her baggy eyes taking note of the faint glow of green, in the navy-blue sky. The sun appeared to be coming up; she stared at it for a minute, her mind trying to clear from the fog. She was becoming cold; the sweat was making the naked parts of her skin line up with goose bumps, without the cover of her blanket, over her now exposed torso.

She turned her head again, this time to glance at the alarm clock. It was almost six a.m., still pretty early, but at the rate she was going, Levy didn’t even want to bother with trying to find sleep again. She kicked off the covers and got to her feet gently, almost rhythmically stepping towards the small kitchenette to start brewing some coffee, ultimately giving up on the notion altogether. If she wasn’t going to sleep for the remaining of her morning, then she at least wanted to be awake enough to read something, before she needed to get ready for her busy day.

Once she got the coffee machine up and running she stood before it, her eyes taking in the semi dark room as she waited for it to brew. The sound of its dripping was bringing her some much-needed comfort. She had nearly finished tidying up the place the night before. All that was left to do, was to go through a stack of books, that she had left by the shelf. She hadn’t bothered with putting them away yet, because she hadn’t felt like organizing them at the time. She was very particular about the way she put away her books. She had a system that only she herself could grasp, but it was befitting of her personal taste and so she stuck with it.

Levy made her way over to the pile, deciding that putting more books away would be the best use of her time, while she waited for the coffee to finish. She kneeled down, filing through the stack and splitting it into various piles based on the nature of the book, sometimes turning towards the shelf to
put one away. Other times she was setting them down on top of one of the many stacks surrounding her.

Within a few minutes she had already made a considerable dent in the work. Meanwhile, the scent of coffee was taking over the small space that was her apartment. She was just about to stop, so she could pour herself a cup, deciding that this next book would be her last one, when she suddenly came across something she hadn’t expected.

Levy paused, her eyes glued to the next book on top of the pile with almost startled uncertainty, as though she hadn’t thought to lay eyes on it ever again. Her chest tightened as she looked over it, a frown was pulling at her lips.

It was her hard covered, Intro to physiology book and it was one of the only school books she still had left from her freshman year of college. She had ended up needing to sell the rest. Much to her dismay, but she hadn’t been able to sell this particular book, only because it hadn’t been in her possession when she had traded in all of the others.

Levy’s fingers were gracing the cover upon finding it, tracing over the letters of the title gently, as her expression softened with slight sadness. She could feel a memory tugging at her subconscious, recent events making it all the more painful, as she continued to pour over the book, taking it up with both hands. She slowly opened the front cover. Her hand was running down the center of the spine, admiring the craftsmanship of its binding. She could hear a voice in the back of her mind and it made her heart ache in such a way that she hadn’t ever thought was possible, before the other night.

“Yea basically… So, take it… Cause I don’t want it anymore.”

“And you’re giving this to me, now? But why? And after all of this time…? I mean… I finished that class last year Gajeel…. I don’t even need this anymore.” Levy heard her own voice from the memory, in response to his.

“So what…? I’m still givin’ it back. Sell it, if ya gotta… I mean hell, I don’t care what ya do with it shrimp, but I definitely have no use for it and besides... It ain’t mine.”

Levy was staring at the hand she had settled over the spine of the open book. Gajeel’s voice was fading along with the memory as her eyelids closed lightly. Thinking about him was by no means, easing her troubles. No, if anything, it just made her feel empty inside, but she didn’t know how to stop. Her subconscious seemed to be clouded with him. His appearances in her dreams, his memory attached to certain items she had long since forgotten about, but had still managed to find their way back into her hands anyways. How was she supposed to not think about him, at this rate?

Levy was staring at the shelf before her, her mind drifting back to the nightmare with a grave expression over her face. Her grip over the book was tightening, as she thought about the way Thibault’s face had looked. It haunted her, seeing that, seeing what Gajeel had reduced him to, but she didn’t know… She could feel herself beginning to tremble, as she imagined the scary version of Gajeel standing before her again, just like in the dream. She didn’t know if it haunted her more than the idea of never seeing him again.

The coffee machine sounded off, breaking Levy from her trance, with a sudden alertness. She swallowed around the lump in her throat, before letting out a small gasping breath just behind it, sucking in the air like she couldn’t get enough of it. She then slammed the book shut and quickly set it back on top of the stack, firmly.
She didn’t want to do this… At least that was what she kept telling herself, as she got to her feet and made her way over to the counter. Her brow was furrowed as she began pouring herself a cup of coffee. She was just so distracted, even still, after Juvia had eased most of her worries concerning Gajeel, but it wasn’t just about him anymore. Something more was bothering her, something of greater significance.

*This... This is going to take some time...* She thought, in an effort to calm her frayed nerves. *I can’t forget what I saw...*

Levy set the coffee pot back down in the machine, her head was going up and her eyes were narrowing. The startling visuals of her dreams were still nesting freshly inside of her head. The pure frightening violence of everything she had seen and been through was given new life and meaning, through her sleeping mind.

*Nor can I forget what almost happened...* She looked down. *To me...*

Her eyes had settled over the lone coffee mug just below her, on the counter. It was filled halfway to the brim with black liquid, patiently waiting for her to add some milk and sugar to lighten both its color, and bitter taste. A discerning frown was pulling at Levy’s lips, as her eyelids lowered over it sadly.

*It’s okay...* She thought. Her hands were slowly wrapping around the porcelain mug to take in its warmth, as if that could somehow make her believe it was true. She could feel her eyes beginning to water, despite the reassuring thought. *I... will be okay...* Her mind spoke, as she used the back of her knuckles to wipe at a persistent tear that was beginning to drip down her cheek.

Her mind was picturing the kind faces of her grandparents, smiling at her. How much she missed them and how much she needed their support at a time like this. Then came the vague memory of her parents faces shortly after. She could feel the loneliness making her chest want to cave in on itself, as she remembered them all to the best of her abilities.

“I am alive...” She spoke in an agonizing voice, unable to keep it together. “And for that I will always be grateful...” She choked out in a half sob, as she saw all of their familiar images, their faces bringing her strength.

The tears were beginning to leak from her eyes, as the full realization of what she had really been through was finally hitting her, in a big way. The shock of everything that had happened was gone, only to be replaced with something that much more powerful. She now felt truly lucky, to have made it out of that traumatic experience with her life and body still intact.

“Thank you...” She managed between muffled sobs, smiling despite the tears. “For watching over me... I promise I will be strong...” Levy finished, her eyes closing as one of the tears dripped into her awaiting coffee, her form was beginning to tremble.

Her hand was clasping over her mouth, in an attempt to stifle a very loud whimper, her posture was doubling over on the counter. Her shoulders were stiffening with insecurity and that was when she finally began to cry, like a person broken. She sobbed like it was easier to do that, then it was to breathe. Her palms pressing into her closed eyes at times, her fingers bracing the counter. Her body was crumbling to the floor and huddling in on itself, like she could no longer bear the weight of it.

She shook with emotion, allowing the flood, because this was what she needed to do. She needed to let herself have this moment, so that she could embrace the rest of her day, like the true lady her family had taught her to be, before she had lost them all. With her weakness exposed and expelled in these private moments, she would then be able to mend and deal with the next few days in the face
of all of her friends and their unanswered questions towards her.

Then finally, after some time, Levy’s eyes opened, red and stinging with a shine worthy of glass, she was slowly pushing herself up. Her hands were grabbing at the counter to steady her wobbling frame, as she got to her feet slowly; her throat was dry and her nose runny. She looked around her apartment with a strange calmness, her puffy face showing all of the signs that her demeanor no longer could, as all of the tears were finally gone. She had exhausted them and now all she could do was, go back to living her life, with the hopes of making her loved ones proud, as they looked on from somewhere unbound by the weight of life’s hardships.

“One day…” She spoke, her eyes closing gently as she leaned back against the counter, to regain her lost breath. “We will see each other again… But until then…” Her eyes opened. “I still have a lot I want to do....” She whispered.

Then after a long moment, Levy finally moved as if it had never even happened. She set to work fixing her coffee in the way that she liked, sipping at it until it was mostly gone. Then heading towards the bathroom for a shower and to brush her teeth. She had a bit more coffee after getting dressed and then she set to work covering the injury on her head with a bandage in front of the bathroom mirror.

Once she finished doing that, Levy took a moment to just stare at the image of her own exhausted face, before rolling her eyes at how horrible she thought she looked.

I look like I’m turning into a zombie… She thought as she began to walk away from the mirror. Baggy eyes, huge bandage across my head… Yea sure… Nobody will notice that… Her mind added sarcastically, all while shaking her head in annoyance.

She made her way back into the main room, after having decided, to go back to reading the book she had been on the night before, just to kill some time as it was still fairly early.

She was feeling much more relaxed now, despite the lack of sleep and the reading was definitely helping, as it kept her mind from wandering back to Gajeel or anything else. The book she was reading was the fifth in her favorite series, a book full of magic, wizard guilds, celestial spirits and disappearing dragons.

As time wore on that morning, Levy finally decided to put the book down and get ready to leave, as she knew Jet and Droy would soon appear outside waiting for her. The three of them always walked to school together on Monday mornings, because they all had early classes that day.

Her mind was still overwhelmed with the fantastic story and it’s amazing characters, as she set to work, putting on her shoes and coat. She made her way back towards the bed, so she could begin to pack up her bag and leave.

I wonder what kind of magic I would have, if I were a mage…? Levy wondered as she stood up from her bed, while draping the messenger bag over her shoulder. That was when something caught her eye, a certain object she had forgotten about. The knife on her dresser, the one Gajeel had insisted she keep and learn how to use for self-defense, the very same weapon that had stabbed him. Thibault’s knife.

Levy stared at it for a moment, unmoving, as if the object was somehow judging her for being weary
of it. She felt stuck while looking at it, unsure of what to do, take it with her, or leave it there untouched. She thought about her dream and how Thibault had been holding the knife before her. How he had stabbed Gajeel and then used it to move in on her, leaving her to feel completely helpless again, just like when she had been in the bathroom at the club.

Levy’s eyes stayed transfixed to the small taunting blade, until the familiar voices of Jet and Droy could be heard from outside. Her head turned and she could see their forms nearing the window in her peripheral vision. She was suddenly becoming illogically worried about the two of them finding out about the knife’s existence. Which was ridiculous, because she knew, there was no way they were even going to come inside her apartment and see it. They rarely ever did that before class, unless maybe she was running late. Otherwise, they would normally just wait outside until she came out, but that didn’t seem to matter to Levy at the moment. Something about leaving the knife there, out in the open on her dresser, felt like a bad idea. Almost as if just looking upon it, would summon the very knowledge of everything she had been trying to keep a secret. That paranoia was enough to finally make her snatch it up.

_Probably something involving words…_ Levy’s mind spoke, going back to the question, about what kind of magic she would possess if she were a wizard like in the book she was reading. She dropped the knife into her bag and then turned for the door. _Like an enchantment of sorts…_ Her thoughts continued as she made her way out, locking the old door behind her. _Heaven knows I could use something like that now…_ She thought as she opened the second door, the one that lead her to outside. _Because I still have no idea what words I am going to say to them now…_ Her mind finished as she stood just before the doorway of her apartment, her eyes settling over her two best friends who were smiling up at her.

“Morning Levy!” They both chimed in unison. Levy looked them over, a small breath was releasing from her lungs. The full impact of the cold air was causing her a slight chill.

“Morning!” She answered lightly; she glanced down at her hands, pulling out some gloves from her bag. “Wow…” She breathed as she quickly slipped them on. “It’s cold today.” She muttered.

“Yea, they’re calling for snow tonight actually!” Jet exclaimed as he stepped forwards. Levy glanced up at him, a small smile appearing over her lips, as if his smile towards her was somehow contagious. She took a step a down from the stoop. “Wow… And it is only fall.”

“You’re telling me…” Droy muttered with a shiver. “I hate the cold…” Levy looked to him, the smile still over her face.

“Let’s get going boys.” She spoke gently. They both looked to her, returning the smile, a slight blush over both of their faces.

“You got it Levy!” Jet replied.

“Let’s go!” Droy chimed and then the three of them began their walk towards campus.

Levy lived much closer to the school compared to Jet and Droy, so they would often meet in front of her apartment, when they all had classes in the morning. The boys didn’t like for Levy to walk alone if they could help it. Issue was, she stayed much later at the school than they did most days due to working, studying or just reading after hours in the library.
The sky was a bright baby blue, tinted pink by the oncoming rays of the sun as it rose ever higher into the heavens. Levy looked on in awe, as its glow greeted her from the surface of each building they passed by. She huddled against the collar of her green coat, in an attempt to warm her already red nose against the chill.

The boys were relatively quiet during the walk. When they finally did speak, it was a normal discussion about how work had gone. They were sure to catch Levy up on all of the restaurant drama she had missed out on the night before. Their stories also managing to make her laugh, while in the process.

Neither one of them asked her any more questions about the origin of her injury, nor did they ask her why she had been so clearly flustered the day before. Proving to her, that Jet had remained true to his word about letting it go, as she had requested of him. They did this by acting completely natural as if none of it had ever even happened and she was grateful for that. It was their way of showing her their support and she was once again thankful to have such understanding people in her life.

After a few more minutes, the three of them were finally arriving on campus, surrounded by students on the move and approaching the quad located in the center of it all. Levy could just make out the distinct pink head of Natsu, among a small crowd, standing around in the frosted grass, between the large admissions building and the school’s token cafe. The admissions tower had a large clock on the outside that overlooked the center of the campus for all to see the time. It would also chime loudly on the hour.

“Hey Levy!” She could hear the voice of Lucy, carrying over everyone’s heads.

She then could see the blond jogging towards her in excitement, wrapped up in a pink coat with fur trim. She had on a knitted winter hat, with a visor over her blond head and she was wearing a dark turtleneck underneath her coat.

“Levy!” Lucy was calling for her, with an arm waving happily as she approached.

Levy smiled weakly at the oncoming blond, despite the scrutiny that she knew Lucy’s presence was sure to bring. She couldn’t help it though; the traumatic events of her weekend had managed to make their twenty-four-hour period apart, feel like an eternity. And so, it felt like it had been ages since she had last laid eyes on Lucy. This may have also been, because at some point, Levy had also doubted her own survival during said events and so, she had truly believed she might not ever get to see her best friend again.

“Oh my gosh-Levy!” Lucy was finally saying through a pant once she had arrived in front of her much shorter friend. Her breath was a visible puff of air, due to the cold. She had a hand leaning against her knees, as she recovered from the short run. “It’s too cold…” She muttered between breaths.

Jet and Droy continued on past the two girls, who clearly wanted to chat. They were headed towards the remaining two, calling towards Natsu, who was waving to them in greeting. Lucy had turned her head to watch them go, checking to make sure they were out of earshot, before she straightened back up and turned back towards Levy.

“So Natsu’s back, huh…?” Levy spoke first, not allowing Lucy the chance. Her head angled past the blond, to get a glimpse at their pink-haired friend, who had long since been absent. Her eyes then shifted back to Lucy who had also turned to look at Natsu.

“Yea… I guess so…” Lucy answered, as she watched Lisanna give Natsu a kiss on the cheek. She could hear her saying her goodbyes to him, as well as Jet and Droy who had now joined them.
Lisanna’s sights then set on the two of them, Lucy and Levy, before she began to wave.

“See ya later, guys!” She called; Lucy and Levy were both quick to return the gesture, calling towards her as well, before Lisanna took her leave. Levy’s hand was coming back down, as Lucy turned to face her. She was once again speaking, before the blond could utter another word.

“Are you glad?” Levy questioned. “I mean… He missed most of his classes last week, right? And you hardly saw him at all.”

“Well yea… I mean… I’m relived at least, because… Oh wait!” Lucy started, as realization hit her. “You don’t even know yet, Levy! I haven’t really gotten to talk to you since the other night!” She exclaimed next, her hands were coming down on both of Levy’s shoulders.

“Know what?” Levy questioned, but she was quickly pushing her head back as Lucy’s face was coming in close to her own. Her chocolate eyes were looking deeply perplexed, as they circled over Levy’s face, finally stopping on a certain spot in particular. And that was when Levy knew that Lucy was staring at the impossible to miss bandage, across her head.

“What the hell is that!?” Lucy snapped and her voice was too loud, so loud in fact, that it caused Levy to wince and step back out of her grasp.

“Uhhh yea…” Levy spoke, turning her head elsewhere, so she could avoid Lucy’s intense stare. “I kind of hurt myself the other day…” Levy explained. “No big deal.”

“No big deal!?” Lucy repeated in outrage. “That looks huge! What the hell did you do?!?” Levy turned back towards Lucy with a weak smile over her face. A small laugh filtered out, once she got a look at her best friend’s stern expression.

“You wouldn’t even believe me if I told you…” She managed. “It’s that ridiculous.” Well it wasn’t a complete lie.

Lucy stared at Levy for a few seconds in silence. Her mind trying to decide on whether she wanted to pursue the subject any further, or just drop it there, as it seemed like Levy had zero interest in retelling the tale.

*She is probably just tired of repeating herself, because I’m sure she had to tell Jet and Droy the whole story... Along with everyone else she works with...* Lucy thought as her eyes took in the exhausted features of Levy’s face.

*Why does she look so tired though...? She then found herself wondering. Could it be...? Because of that guy she was supposedly with, the other night..? Maybe she’s seeing him?!* Lucy folded her arms at this thought; she had been waiting to see Levy just to find out more about the whole situation, and that was why she hadn’t wanted to speak to her, in front of Jet and Droy. Surely those two would have been heartbroken, if they found out Levy may have hooked up with someone from the club.

“Levy…” Lucy finally began, after a shared moment of silence. Levy’s eyes immediately perked up at the seriousness in Lucy’s voice. “Did you not get any sleep or something...?” She finally asked. “You look tired.” She added.

“You could say that.” Levy replied nervously, her eyes averting upwards. Lucy’s eyes narrowed in on her, in suspicion.

“Oh yea..? Why’s that?” Lucy asked next, her voice lifting in question, making Levy glance back down at her. “Did you find yourself a good book to ‘read’ the other night or something?” Lucy asked, putting emphasize on the word ‘good’ and finger quotes around the word ‘read’. Levy paused
as Lucy continued, completely immune to Levy’s shock. “I mean heck… Maybe it was so good, that you decided to read it twice..? Again, last night… Tell me is that possible?” Lucy questioned, with a roll of her eyes as she finally landed her stare back on Levy, who hadn’t budged. The smaller girl didn’t even look like she was breathing, a few seconds passed by, but they felt like forever. “Well?! Did you!?” Lucy finally snapped, becoming impatient.

“Nooooooo!” Levy answered back abruptly, but she could feel her face reddening as she began to walk forwards, without thinking. She was moving past Lucy some, so that the blond wouldn’t get a look at her heated cheeks.

“Hey!” Lucy called after her, as she whipped around to face Levy’s retreating back. “Hold on a minute!” Lucy snapped and Levy did stop, but she did not dare turn around.

Her sights moved over to one side as she could see Lucy in the corner of her eye, her breathing had picked up some. If she couldn’t remain calm now, Lucy would never believe her, but she found it incredibly difficult to act cool, while being interrogated. She was so bad at this ‘lying thing’. Her heart was thumping hard, as she thought about Gajeel and how badly she wished she could tell Lucy, about him. About how he had rescued her and about how caring he had actually been. She wanted to express to someone, how much their time together actually meant to her.

Don’t say anything… She thought as her eyes closed from the stress of it all. No good will come of it!

Levy’s eyes were opening, as she could hear Lucy coming back up from behind her, the blond was once again appearing in her face.

“Don’t lie to me Levy! Cana saw you!” Lucy exclaimed and at this, Levy was raising an eyebrow at the blond. The mention of Cana got the wheels in her head turning and she was able to calm down a bit.

“Cana saw what exactly?” Levy fired back; now back on her game, because in truth, she genuinely wanted to know.

“She said she saw you leave the club with a guy!” Lucy answered back, her hands settling on her hips. “Was that, a lie?” Lucy asked defiantly. “I mean… You were gone after that…” She added, her hand going out.

“A guy?” Levy repeated. “That’s all she said?” Levy questioned, completely ignoring the rest of Lucy’s words.

“Yes! Isn’t that enough!?” Lucy asked, in utter disbelief, but she only became more confused as Levy suddenly looked thoughtful and continued to not say a word. Another few seconds of silence stretched between them, before Lucy was once again getting annoyed with the go around. What was with the secrecy? Lucy had never known Levy to be this way, and with her of all people!

“So, ya gonna tell me what the heck is going on or not!?” Lucy asked in annoyance, finally earning Levy’s eyes back on her, as if she had just remembered the blond was there, talking to her.

“Maybe you should be the one to tell.” Levy threw back.

“Excuse me?” Lucy questioned in bewildered confusion.

“What happened between you and that guy I left you with…?” Levy started, as she glanced up in remembrance. “Let’s see… What was his name again…?”

“Loke!?” Lucy spat, as her face suddenly turned bright red.
“Oh yea!” Levy replied, a smile appearing over her lips, as she looked back to Lucy’s flustered 
expression. “Oh…” Levy added. “So, does that mean, there is something to tell then?!” Levy 
exclaimed, becoming excited by the prospect. “Did you-?” But she was suddenly cut off by Lucy’s 
voice

“I think we’re through here.” Lucy was uttering, finally ready to drop the subject altogether and then 
she was the one turning away from Levy. Levy had to stop and stare with wide disbelieving eyes, as 
Lucy meandered away from her.

Wow, no way! Did Lucy actually do something with Loke after all?!! Lucy was so shy; Levy hadn’t 
actually expected her to really do much of anything with Loke, other than just hang around with him 
at the club. Especially when she was aware of blonde’s feelings for Natsu.

“Hold on…!” Levy called after Lucy, as she jogged forwards to catch up with the blond. Once she 
arrived in step with Lucy, she was looking at her face from one side as they both walked together. 
Lucy was ignoring Levy though, by just staring straight ahead, as if the shorter girl wasn’t even 
there. “You didn’t…? Did you?!” Levy was uttering in question, but still, Lucy said nothing. “With 
Loke?!” Levy then asked and there was once again silence, but Lucy’s face was growing in color 
considerably, and her lip was twitching awkwardly. Levy couldn’t help the smile, that was creeping 
over her face, as she watched. “Oh my… Lucy.” Levy began in a playful voice. “Good for you!” 
She then added, with an impressed laugh, her tone sounding proud as she nudged at Lucy.

“Will you shut up!” Lucy finally snapped back, as she turned to look at a laughing Levy, just as the 
two of them had arrived with the rest of their small group.

“Shut up, about what?” Natsu questioned, as he looked at the two girls, who had just joined them. 
They were now positioned between Jet and Droy in their small standing circle.

“Nothing!” Both girls answered, almost too quickly in unison, causing all three boys to trade 
questioning looks with each other. It was quiet for a few seconds among the small group of friends, 
until the unannounced appearance of another showed up, before anyone could say much more.

“Heyyy! So, there are my two awesome ladies!” Came the loud voice of Cana, as her arms suddenly 
draped over both Levy and Lucy’s shoulders, from behind, thus scaring them both. Her head 
appeared between the two surprised girls, as she pulled them both in close, huddling the three of 
them together tightly, nearly choking the life out of them. They could feel the slick material of her 
purple winter coat around their necks. “I’ve been waitin’ to run into you two, cause I know ya both 
have awesome stories for me!” She laughed with a big grin over her face, her eyes closing happily. 
They both gasped, until Cana’s grip on them loosened a bit. Then her eyes opened and her head 
lowered discreetly. Her grin was fading into a dangerous smirk, as her eyes glinted at them, with 
mischief.

“So how about it, huh?” She asked, her voice was becoming suggestive. “Just how lucky, did you 
two get on Saturday night?” She finished, causing both Levy and Lucy to look up at her with pure 
mortification, etched across their faces.

“What?” Natsu was the first one to question Cana’s words with confusion. He pushed both of his 
hands into the front pockets of his green pullover hoodie, as he stared at the both of them, with his 
head tilted. Jet and Droy were both looking towards Levy with misunderstanding.

“Whoa…!” Lucy exclaimed as she pushed herself out from under Cana’s arm. “Look at the time 
guys!” Lucy added, pointing to the large clock on the admissions building. “I gotta get to class, like 
now!” The blond uttered, as everyone stared at her and then she began to turn away, breaking into a
“Hey! Wait a minute Lucy!” Natsu yelled as he took off after her. “You said you’d buy me breakfast!” They could hear his voice echoing, as he quickly disappeared just behind Lucy.

“Huh…” Cana shrugged watching them go. “I didn’t get to ask for my car back yet…” Cana muttered, but her comment was ignored, as Jet and Droy were too busy looking at Levy, as she too moved away from Cana’s arm. Jet’s eyes narrowed and Droy’s widened, timidly.

“What’s she talking about, Levy?” Droy asked.

“Yea, I want to know too…” Jet added. Cana looked from the two boys to Levy, who was quiet for the moment. Levy opened her mouth to speak, but then the loud bong of the clock sounded off, signaling the first morning classes start.

“Shit!” Jet cursed.

“Serious we gotta get going!” Droy exclaimed, looking to Jet with urgency. “Professor Mine is already pissed at us, for screwing up the lab last week! He’ll probably kill us if we don’t beat him to class!”

“Yea, I know, you’re right. Let’s go!” Jet snapped. They both turned towards Levy, who was standing there watching them both with wide eyes. “We’ll talk later Levy.” Jet spoke, his voice sounding serious. Levy took that to mean he again, wanted answers.

“Lighten up!” Droy added to ease the tension, once he got a look at Levy’s concerned face. “It’ll be okay!” It was his way of apologizing for Jet seeming too pushy. Levy nodded at them, as they both turned away and began to run. She could tell that the two of them were probably about to have their own conversation, an argument about her, most likely.

Cana was still standing beside Levy with her arms folded, as she leaned on one foot and watched Jet and Droy vanish.

“Well…!” She finally spoke up, causing Levy to turn and look at her. “Those two sure are something, when it comes to you.” She commented, sarcastically.

“Yea…” Levy breathed out. “Ya know what… I should probably get going too…” She then said, while attempting to shuffle away from Cana. “My teacher isn’t too strict, but still… I don’t want to miss anything.”

“Wait.” Cana demanded, as she grabbed a firm hold of Levy’s shoulder from behind. Levy paused at the seriousness in Cana’s voice.

“What? Don’t you have classes too?” Levy asked with a turn of her head to look at Cana, from over her shoulder. But Cana’s violet eyes looked so stern, that Levy found it almost unnerving to see her with such an uncharacteristic expression over her face.

“No… I just came here, because I knew you’d be here and I wanted to talk to you.” Cana stated firmly, her hand dropping off of Levy’s shoulder. “But if you leave now, I know I won’t catch you again for the rest of the day. Hell, maybe even the rest of the week… I don’t want to wait that long, just in case.” Cana explained. The air of her breath was visible, as she spoke. Her head lowered so that her eyes were leveled with Levy’s.

Levy could see the movement of Cana’s eyes, glancing over the bandage on her head. She stared back at the brunette for a moment, her own expression easing, as she was no longer surprised after
hearing what Lucy had said.

“Would you like to go get a cup of coffee with me Cana?” Levy asked, her voice softening. Her question caused the smirk on Cana’s face to return.

“Not as much as I’d like a drink, but I guess it will have to do… I mean if you’re buyin’ I’m totally game.”

This comment made Levy nearly laugh, before the two of them headed over to the school’s café.

Once they were there, Cana took a seat at a small round table, while Levy headed towards the counter to buy them the coffees. The café was a small rectangular shaped room, an open little nook, attached to the bottom floor of one of the school’s many buildings. There were large windows off to one corner of the room that provided a nice view of the street. The counter was tucked back against the farthest wall from the entryway. The colors were a chocolaty looking brown and a warm gold. The lighting was soft, setting a tone for the space, much like the easygoing background music. It was a place meant to help students relax and focus on whatever they needed too.

Cana’s table was seated near the windows, but she had her back facing the glass, so she could keep an eye on Levy. She watched as the smaller girl walked towards her carrying a large coffee in each hand. Her forehead was crinkling in curiosity, as Levy approached. She could see Levy’s hand trembling slightly, as she set one of the coffee’s down on the table.

Cana eyed the coffee that had just been placed in front of her with curiosity; her eyebrow was rising as she set her sights back on Levy, who was now taking a seat across from her. Levy was avoiding Cana’s gaze by looking down at her own cup. She had both of her tiny hands wrapped around the cardboard and she looked so forlorn that Cana would have, had to of been completely dense not to sense her unease. It was quiet for a moment, until Levy let out an audible breath of relief and that was when Cana decided to speak.

“So…..” Cana began. She looked away from Levy to her own bag, pulling it into her lap, to search for something inside of it. “Ya okay?” She asked, stealing a glance back up at Levy, just as Levy did the same. They matched eyes for a moment, but Levy didn’t speak, so Cana continued, but she looked back down to her bag. “Cause… I couldn’t help, but notice.” The sound of her moving stuff in her bag was audible, between her words. “You seem a little on edge…” Cana finished.

“What makes you think that?” Levy asked, causing Cana to pause the sifting through her purse, to shoot Levy another skeptical look

“Oh, I don’t know…” She began, looking back down. “Maybe, because you’re shaking like a leaf…” Cana uttered, finally managing to find whatever it was that she had been looking for. Levy turned her head away from Cana, looking elsewhere.

“I’ve just…” Levy began, looking back to Cana. “I’ve had a lot of coffee today…” She finished. “This is decaf.” She added, gesturing towards her own cup.

“Ah yea? Well… I have something that might help ya relax a bit.” Cana spoke as she leaned forwards. Her torso was hovering just above the table, as her hand came out towards Levy. She was sliding something over the surface, a crinkled paper bag with something inside of it. Levy’s eyes widened, as she got a look at the top of a flask sticking out of the paper and then she shot a disturbed
glance back up at Cana’s face.

“Cana?!” She exclaimed in a hushed voice, as she glanced around.

“Shh…” Cana shushed. “Don’t freak out, okay?” Levy looked back to Cana. “I always have one on me… It helps…”

“Helps how?!” Levy questioned in outrage

“Alcoholism…” Cana shrugged with a laugh. “And well… For situations like this…” She added with a more serious voice, as she pushed her hand with the flask towards Levy’s hand, nudging the girl’s fingers with it. They made eye contact again. “Go ahead… Just a sip…” Cana pushed. “It won’t kill ya… If anything, it will probably just calm you down…”

Levy stared at her for a moment, before finally snatching the flask up, as ordered and taking the cap off. She then put her lips to it and quickly threw back her head, allowing the liquid to hit her throat. She was hardly in a place to deny anything that might ease her stress, even if it was just a little.

The burn of whatever drink Cana had just given her, was overpowering to Levy’s tiny body. She could feel it warming her up from head to toe, almost immediately upon contact. Her cheeks were flushing and her lips were tingling as she nearly coughed some of it up, but she managed to swallow it down, with a slight gag as she pulled the flask away from her mouth. She wiped at her lips in recovery, her eyes had glossed over and she could swear she was also sweating a bit, just from that one swig.

“Nice…” Cana was saying as Levy glanced around, while screwing the flask cap back on. “Bet that sobered you up, huh?” Cana asked, causing Levy to shoot Cana a disapproving stare as she handed the flask and bag, back over to her. “You know what I mean…” Cana replied with a shrug, referring to the irony of her own words.

“Just tell me what you want to talk about Cana.” Levy demanded with a cough, and in a hoarse voice. She could still feel the burn in her esophagus, not to mention the loaded effects of the alcohol, which was hitting her body with a slight involuntary twitch. Levy was by no means, capable of handling something on par with Cana’s proof. Another sip or two of that stuff and she would have been drunk off of her ass.

Cana began unscrewing the cap off of the flask again. Levy then preceded to take a drink of her coffee, to rid herself of the awful taste. She blinked a few times, her eyes transfixing to Cana, as she watched the brunette take the lid off of her own coffee cup, so that she could pour a little of the flask’s contents into her own coffee.

“Black Steel Gajeel.” Cana finally announced. The answer caused Levy to practically spit out, what little bit of coffee had made its way into her mouth.

Cana glanced up just as Levy was swallowing and then once again exploding into a small fit of coughing, practically choking on the warm liquid.

“How…?” Levy was gasping with a raspy voice, as she wiped at her mouth. Levy had believed Lucy about Cana seeing her with a guy, but she had never imagined Cana would know who Gajeel was, by name and everything. “How do you…?”

“Just breathe.” Cana was saying, as she stuffed the flask back into her bag. “How do I, what? Know
him? Know about you guys?” Levy was nodding, just as her coughing fit was nearly through. She covered her mouth, her eyes narrowing as Cana continued. “Oh, I know about Black Steel Gajeel… He has a reputation.” Cana spoke, as she sat back and took a heavy drink from her own coffee. She then looked at the cup in her hand with a raised eyebrow. “Much better…” She added, before glancing back up at Levy, whose mouth had dropped open. Levy took a moment to think, before speaking, her attempt to once again, remain calm.

“What kind of… Reputation?” Levy finally asked. Her voice was still recovering as her brow lowered. “Do you mean like a… Gangster?” She choked out, especially on that last word. Her head was low as she said this, worried that someone might overhear them.

“Well, there’s that, and…” Cana began; her words were tapering off as she looked to Levy. There was silence as they stared at one another. “Levy…” Cana started, but Levy was quick to interrupt her.

“Great…” Levy was breathing out, as she glanced down. She set her coffee down on the table and brought her hands up to her head to run them through her hair. She then looked back up to Cana. “What have you heard?” She asked knowingly, as Cana folded her arms and leaned back.

“That he gets around…” Cana stated. “A lot.” She added bluntly. Levy sighed, sitting up herself and leaning back in her chair, folding her arms uncomfortably. “He has a reputation among the ladies, ya know?” Cana explained. “I’ve heard his name at a few of the bars I go to, and I’ve seen him around as well… Can’t say I’ve actually spoken to him myself, but…” She looked to Levy, gauging her reaction as she continued, but Levy didn’t portray any emotion, other than what appeared to be impatience. “They say he is good for a one-night stand and only one, because… There won’t ever be a second.” Cana hesitated, locked to Levy’s gaze, to see what she might do or say, but once again Levy stayed quiet and so, she continued. “He doesn’t get phone numbers. He doesn’t learn names. He doesn’t date. He doesn’t have girlfriends. He is literally just… Sex.” Cana finally finished and she could swear Levy’s face twitched. They were both silent for a second, locked in a stare down until finally Levy spoke.

“Why are you telling me this?” Levy asked. She tried to say it calmly, but her tone was cold, her defense was building. Cana shrugged, but her expression didn’t change.

“Oh, I don’t know… You tell me…?” Cana began. “You were the one who called him a ‘gangster’ after all.” Cana added, causing Levy to glance away with a bitter smile.

“It’s in the name, Cana. You said it.” Levy stated firmly, looking back at her. Her smile was gone and her eyes were distant. “Black Steel? That’s obviously a street name… For someone…” Levy replied with a hand out.

The lie was so blatant that Cana’s stare actually hardened on the smaller girl, sitting across from her. Neither one of them could believe, that Levy was even willing to keep up with such a front, but she stood her ground, outright denial being her position of choice.

“Yea… Well… You’re right.” Cana spoke slowly. “It is a street name… Because he is a gangster.” Cana began, her eyes narrowing on Levy. “A very dangerous one…” She raised an eyebrow, as she kept her eyes over Levy’s face. “With nothing more to give any girl, past one memorable night of possibly hot, but meaningless sex.”

Levy turned her head away at that. It was difficult to hear it said so brazenly, especially by someone else, even though she knew it to be true. She could feel something inside of her, beginning to ache and she couldn’t bring herself to look up at Cana’s face for the moment. She was too hurt.
“I…” She uttered, glancing down at her coffee again. “Still have no idea…” She finally summoned the will to look back up at Cana, but she was starting to crack. “Why, you are telling me this…” Cana’s brow pushed together at that, and her expression eased.

“Listen… I don’t’ normally like to get too involved in other people’s personal business…” She began, her eyes scaling over the bandage on Levy’s head once more. “That’s why I didn’t even bother to ask you about that thing on your head…”

“It’s nothing.” Levy quickly cut in. She had her eyes down and her head was shaking with the answer, but then she glanced back up, as Cana began to speak over her.

“Look, it doesn’t matter. I don’t care. Because it’s your business and I can tell you don’t want to share it… But…” She drifted, her body was leaning forwards some. “Levy… You are my friend.” She added, her hand was reaching out to touch Levy’s shoulder. “So, I can’t stay entirely quiet about everything I know.” Her hand was leaving Levy’s shoulder, as she sat back again. Levy was looking back up at Cana’s face, with her eyes narrowed in perplexity.

“Okay…” Levy finally muttered. “Fair enough…” She gestured with a nudge and a glance towards Cana. “Go ahead then…” Cana folded her arms at that.

“Well, for one thing, I know what you are looking for.” She stated. Her stare was digging deep into Levy’s own. “And it’s not somebody like him…” She added with a shake of her head. “It’s not a person who could hurt you in all of the many different ways, that he could…”

“Cana…” Levy interrupted, her tone was like a warning, but Cana ignored her and just continued.

“And I’m just telling you this!” She exclaimed, speaking over Levy. Her eyes averted upwards as she continued. “So then, that way, if you ever do run into him somewhere… And if by some miracle, you ever do end up… Ya know… Sleeping with him or something…” Cana explained, playing along with Levy’s lie, as her eyes came back down to Levy’s face. Levy looked away again, releasing a withheld breath of distress. “You’ll already know what to expect…"

“Cana…” Levy tried again, but Cana wouldn’t stop. Levy’s face had grown considerably pale, as their conversation withered on.

“Because that man!” Cana snapped, her hand pointing elsewhere, as her upper body began to lean forwards again. “From what I hear at least…” Her head dipped down and her voice became quiet. They’re faces were so close, that Levy was forced to lock eyes with her again. “He has a way of making women feel ‘special’ in the bedroom.” Cana sat back, once that was out and just tilted her head. “Hell, he gives them the time of their lives and then he just walks away and never looks back.” She exclaimed with a shrug of her shoulders. “And even if he does ‘see’ them again.” She finger quoted the word ‘see’. “He doesn’t give them the time of day, because they were never on his radar to begin with.” She added sternly. “Trust me… I would know.” Her head angled forwards. “I’ve heard enough ranting women, to last me a lifetime…” She finally finished. There were a few seconds of silence, before her eyes glanced back over to Levy. “Do ya catch my drift?” She then asked, but Levy was silent, her eyes were on the table. She was staring down at the surface with such intensity, it was as if she were reading some hidden text, lost within the grain of the wood.

“Yes…” She finally replied, before glancing back up at Cana’s face. “I understand.” She clarified in a monotone, portraying no emotion.

“He’s no good.” Cana reiterated firmly, as a nice sum up of her point. “And that’s just one reason why… I didn’t even get into all of the gangster stuff… Which I actually know a little about, but you seem to be aware so…” She drifted off, looking back up at Levy, who was looking down again,
avoiding her gaze. She could swear Levy looked sad, but it was hard to say. She was most definitely thoughtful, at least. “Men that get around like that, are just… Well… Who knows what the hell their carrying? And you don’t want anyone like that, Levy. You’re…”

“Cana.” Levy began, interrupting Cana for the last time. She looked up; her expression was rigid, as they made eye contact. She didn’t want to hear it. She didn’t want hear people’s assumptions about her, because she knew what they all thought of her and she hated it. She hated being seen as someone so weak and frail, that she needed to be shielded or treated like she was naive.

“I don’t need your protection.” Levy stated. Her voice was firm, borderline angry. It was another warning for Cana to back off. “I can take care of myself… My judgment is sound. I can make my own choices.”

“I know.” Cana spoke quickly; Levy’s tone was not lost on her, because Cana did have a good understanding of people. “I know you’re smart Levy… You’re together.” She added. “You’re nothing like me…” Her voice softened and her violet eyes shifted down in insecurity, but she quickly looked back up, in order to move past it. “But that’s also why I needed to say this to you, because I know that world better than you do… And I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t at least, warn you… Because as I said, you are my friend.”

Levy looked down again, once Cana had finished. Both women were silent again, for nearly a full minute. Left to their own thoughts, about what the other was thinking. Levy was taking Cana’s words into consideration. She felt guilty once more, for not only the secrets, but for getting insulted over her friend’s concern.

“Cana…” Cana looked up; Levy’s gaze on her, had softened. “Let me just get this point across…” She spoke gently now. “If, as you said, by some miracle, I ever did meet Black Steel Gajeel…” Her gaze moved downwards. Her fingers were picking at the cardboard sleeve on her coffee cup, as she continued. “And if I ever did happen to take him back to my place…” She turned her head away; her cheeks were flushing, just ever so slightly. “And something did happen between us…” She paused, looking elsewhere as Cana just stared at her, hanging on her every word. “I wouldn’t be dumb enough to not only, not be safe… But also… To think, it could mean anything more, than what it was…” She finished, finally turning back to look at Cana, with a bittersweet smile on her face. Cana’s brow was lowering though, as she could see the sadness in Levy’s expression. “So you see… Nothing to worry about.” Levy then added. Her voice was light and her eyes were closing, as she smiled at Cana from across the table, despite the mangled pain that was forming in her chest.

If that’s true Levy… Then why do you look so sad…? Cana wondered with a furrowed brow, but she slowly returned Levy’s smile, if only to ease the mood.

“Okay… I mean I thought so, but… I just felt the need to say something… Maybe to ease my own mind…” She replied gently. “But you’re right, Levy… You know what you’re doing. I should have a little more faith in you.” She added softly. “I won’t be bugging you about that, anymore… But should you ever need a drink…” Cana motioned towards her bag. “To calm you down again… You come find me.”

“Ha yea… I think what you mean to say is, if I ever want to get completely wasted.” Levy laughed and Cana just shrugged.

“Well yea… That too.” Cana spoke. “I did finally get to see Lucy completely drunk, might be your turn next.” And with that Levy’s eyes widened.

“Wait? Did Lucy really get that bad?” Levy questioned. That might explain some things…” She then muttered, but Cana just laughed.
“What do you mean!? Of COURSE, she did!” Cana exclaimed. “Man, do I have stories for you!” She then added excitedly and with that, the two of them began to chat about what had happened with Lucy, Loke and Cana at the club. And for the first time since everything had started, Levy was actually, genuinely laughing, to the point that her face hurt. She ended up skipping her first class that day, because for once, taking a break needed to take priority.

Her hands were padded flat against the wall. One was sliding down, slick with a film of sweat as it traveled over the bumpy surface, much like the rest of her body. Methodical fingers were making a delicate path across the soft skin of her belly, only to settle over the curve of her hip and hasten their hold. They were, but two naked bodies, one standing over the other, his head facing her back. His eyes were gliding down the path of her spine, only to settle over the roundness of her presented backside.

Jellal’s grip on her was firm, it was of great contradiction to his former caress, but Erza remained outwardly unfazed nonetheless. Refusing him such satisfaction by being ever defiant, even while being on the cusp of intimacy. He was shoving his body against her own in response to this stubborn disposition; his sturdy weight was falling over her back. She could feel him rubbing up against her inner most thigh from behind; positioning himself between her open legs.

She stiffened, her lips pursing with an audible intake of air. Her face was flushing; the oncoming heat was inescapable, as flesh breached flesh. Her hands tensed over the wall, her fingers curling with the agony of that feeling. Her head was going up and back some, after the brunt of that contact was over and now he moving inside. His length was sliding up and into her gently, tearing at her insides and leaving her to feel hot and wet. Her mouth was opening, a small moan filtering out; her eyelids were falling shut with the force of his stride. He was moving deeper still, though slowly, there was no intent to stop. Her eyelids stayed closed as she took to his every inch with slight pain, her body cringing from the intrusion of his presence, but then instantly melting in the forbidden indulgence of it soon after. She was made so feverish by the satisfaction of him being within her, that she found it almost difficult to stay on her feet. Her knees were growing weak and she felt as though, she could cave in at any moment, the act leaving her in a trembling heap of sweat and unsorted desire.

He could sense it, her normally strong-willed resolve was already breaking to that of a more carnal nature, and it pleased him. He took a certain pleasure in reducing a woman such as Erza, to this state, because she was the only woman worthy of his efforts. She was after all; his queen and she upheld the title like no other ever could.

Her existence to him was like a hurricane; so full of various emotions and mangled personality traits. Her outward persona was strong and firm, almost downright brutal at times. Her name was well known and worthy of one’s fear, for the thrashing she was capable of and the devastation she could reduce one to. She was a beautiful storm, meant only to be admired from afar. Terrifying when her winds were facing your direction. Only he dared to brave her completely alone, because he was one of the only few who knew better. He was one of the only few, who knew her completely to her core… And to know Erza Scarlet truly, was to come at her defenseless, prepared to face the wrath of those spiraling winds.

Inside the eye of her storm the truth would make itself known. This woman was calm to her center; her mind strategic and damn near devoid of panic, which made her the safe heaven when faced with immortal danger. She kept her love tucked away, but close to her heart, much like her weaknesses. They all lay hidden beneath the outer winds, surrounded and locked away, like flesh wrapped in a
suit of armor. Only to be released when truly needed.

Jellal contemplated her; his form was now flushed up against her skin and he could go no further, his flesh was sticking to her, in due part to his own sweat. He glanced up at her head, he suspected her lost in the heat of sensuality, but she was quickly proving him wrong by the way she squirmed underneath him.

Ever the fighter, she rarely made things easy for him and this was what made Erza so dangerous. For each and every time she seemed beaten and cornered, it was those same vulnerabilities that would fuel her strength once more, leaving an air of mystery to her each and every action. She couldn’t be predicted, and she failed logic in this sense, because she showed every indication of being anticipated from the aura she manifested. Rigid, like her strict moral code and her unyielding tenacity, but then surprisingly caring and naked in her emotional embrace.

Jellal braced his hold over her, he had every intention of answering her back, and in fact, there was nothing he enjoyed more. He found the challenge that was her pride, to be one of the most arousing aspects of Erza’s personality. His hand was tearing away from her hip, so that his palm could rest against her chin. His finger was forcing its way into the wetness of her mouth, taking enjoyment out of the way her lips wrapped around it. Meanwhile he was gently rubbing up further inside, his length causing her a sharp twinge of pain, but also lethal pleasure. He rocked against her body once more and this seemed to have the affect he was hoping for.

Erza was caving to him, soaking in the desires, rather than fighting them. His chest was now resting over her spine; she was bent over just enough, to give him the leverage he needed as they both stood. His head was settled over the back of her neck, his face lost in a veil of silky scarlet, as he breathed in her heady scent. His body was huffing with a pant, as he listened to the sounds of her shallow breaths in return. The vibration of each one, was moving into him, while he lay against her trembling form with all of his weight. Her body was gripping to him tightly and so beautifully, molding and adjusting in a pool of blind heat, he could feel the wetness over his eyelids as his head pounded from it. He didn’t want to move for the moment, appreciating the feeling with a groan, until he felt the scrape of teeth along the top of his finger.

Jellal smirked; his own hair was sticking to his drenched forehead, as he turned his head, his finger was pulling itself free from the prison of her mouth, but only to wrap his hand around either side of her chin. His fingers were rough and pushing into her cheek.

“My, my…” He whispered arrogantly into her ear, his breath was hot as he panted. It was hard not to sound exasperated, when she was still so tightly wrapped around him. “So, it’s going to be like that, then…?” He questioned, his hand letting go of her face roughly, only to move down and grope around one of her hanging breasts.

He gave her a slight jolt, his body rocking painfully further, before he then squeezed her breast tightly. It was filling the scope of his hand, her nipple pinching between two of his fingers. Erza was once again, squirming beneath him, there was a small sound coming from her lips as she twitched, something between a groan and a breath, before she was quickly removing one of her hands from the wall to grab at Jellal’s wrist tightly.

Before he could react, she was already ripping his hand away from her breast, her form straightening up enough, that he was forced away from her. She was beginning to move, her body twisting, but this time Jellal was quicker. He was able to catch one of her wrist; she was already facing him, when he was able to snatch up the other. He was wrapping them together in both hands and forcing them back down, but behind her back.

Her defiant stare was fixated on him, as she glared up at him in her compromising position. Her
large, bare chest was raised up and made hard to ignore as they shifted with her each and every breath, just below his chin. He knew what she wanted, she no longer wanted to be facing the wall; she wanted him to look at her during. His devious smirk stayed planted, but his eyes grew gentle and Erza tried not to look affected by it. She glanced away, failing miserably, as her expression eased and her cheeks reddened.

His eyes were finally traveling down to her very prominent chest. He finally let go of her wrists; one hand settling over the small of her back lightly, while the other was going to her thigh. The two of them fell back against the wall that was just behind them gently.

Jellal was pulling her one leg up; lifting her some with the wall’s aid, enough to provide him with the leverage needed. Her head was now level with his, his face was coming close, and the air of his heavy breathing was blowing against her, before his mouth was coming over her own. His tongue was going between her lips at just the same time as his lower body was pressing up against hers again, she could feel him positioning once more. The throb of his length was prodding at her, before it was once again pushing between her legs.

There was a break in the tension; Erza was pulling away from his mouth to breathe. Her teeth clamped down and her eyes slammed shut, as he pushed inside of her once again, his whole length plunging into her much faster this time. The slickness made the movement more fluent, but she could still feel the weight of him being there as her body reveled in the pleasure of that moment.

“Erza…” Jellal was breathing between pants. His forehead was pressing against hers, both of them drenched in sweat. He was pulling her other leg up, giving him just a little more lead way, as she let out a small pain filled moan, before taking another breath. Her legs wrapped around his torso, her shaky fingers were digging into his shoulders and she finally opened her eyes to look at him. He had pulled away enough so that she could see him smiling at her. His expression was worn, but happy, his gentle nature was coming through, more than anything else. “I love you.” He was saying, making her return the smile, with her own tired expression.

“I love you too.” She breathed, a shiver running over her. And then she was bracing, her whole body going rigid as he was pressing into her once again. His lips managed to find her mouth through the oncoming chaos. His body was moving, his grip on her tightening, his fingers digging into her as he began to rock himself in and out. Their kiss was sloppy and wet as Jellal’s body set the rhythm, up and down.

They pulled apart, both breathing heavy from the constant collision, but he didn’t stop. She looked to him; she could feel the seeping wetness mounting, with each time he pulled out and he just stayed focused on pleasing her. His jaw was clenched, his expression serious, yet determined. It was somehow both endearing and provocative to witness his efforts, while feeling them as well. Her arms wrapped over his shoulders as she shuttered. Her fingers were reaching down his back and clawing into his skin. The feeling of him sliding back, was making her pulse with heat, as she clung to his body tightly, she didn’t want to let him go. She only wanted more, as much as he could give.

Soon they were both soaked and breathing in wild tandem, Erza’s mouth was opening, soft screams coming out. She finally had to push away from him some in exhaustion from the repeated blows, the wetness of their sweat made it feel more like their skin was pealing apart. Her back and head hit the wall, as she moaned in pleasure.

Jellal got a look at her red face, her eyes were closed and her head leaned back. Her body was shifting up and down with his each and every thrust, her breast bouncing with his movements as she panted. Her red hair was cascading behind her and against the wall, dragging over the surface and sticking to her skin. He could hardly stand the sight of it. His body was moving faster, the friction
was driving him mad, as he could feel her tensing. Finally, his mouth crashed down over one of her moving breasts. His tongue was dragging over her nipple, quickly swirling around it only once, before he stuck it between his teeth. He was devouring her until his lower half started unhinging, the force and rhythm of his strides instead taking priority, as he straightened back up. Her body was shifting up the wall, each time he rocked forward. She was becoming so taut; her head came down and her face cringed.

“Jellal…!” She moaned his name loudly; it was more like a yell. Spasms were moving through her. She was clawing at him, tearing at his skin with her nails. The heat erupted as her release spilled around him.

“Just a little more…” He was muttering between gasps. His body was pushing into her a few more times, as he tightened his grip. It was hard to fight the feeling of her body tensing over his. He was pushing into her once more, as forcefully as he could muster, letting out a loud breath. He was meeting her wave of warmth; she was so tight upon her series of release, that he found his own body tensing as well. He was flowing into her upon his finish; both of them thriving in the relief of that feeling, elated by the fact, that they had been able to give that to each other.

Then finally Jellal was quickly easing in exhaustion, they both were. Erza felt him begin to give way first, her legs quickly slid back down to the floor, her back still against the wall, but she was once again on her shaky feet, when his head fell to her shoulder. Her arms came around him and then silence took over, as they stayed together like that for a long moment.

Her hand was brushing through the hair on the back of his head as she embraced him. There was a weak smile over her face as her eyes stayed closed, pure bliss that she could only ever feel with him in her arms. He too was smiling as he stayed over her shoulder, his eyes finally opening as he could feel her trembling.

“Erza…” He spoke her name so calmly, as if he wasn’t exhausted, when he clearly was. He seemed concerned now. “Are you all right…?” He questioned softly.

“Yes… I’m fine…” She uttered, her embrace tightening, and her smile only growing. “With you here, I could never not be…” She finally pulled away from him and they both smiled at each other with half lidded eyes. “Promise me…” She spoke softly. “That you’ll be careful.” Jellal’s smile only widened.

“When am I ever not careful?” He questioned slyly and Erza could only look on, her smile was fading as Jellal turned away from her. She watched his naked body walk away and then he began picking up his clothes.

It was evening now and the sun was setting. The two of them had spent all day and night together, within the confines of Erza’s loft, making love and just enjoying each other’s company while they still could, before work was calling them both back to reality. Jellal already had his pants on, as Erza watched him, stepping forward.

“If Jose really is going to try and kill Banaboster…” Jellal paused at Erza’s words, his form stiffened and his head turned back to look at her.

“He would send Aria…” Jellal stated. Erza took another step towards him, her eyes were widening with realization.

“Then this could be our chance.” She chimed. “If we could catch Aria’s attempt on Banaboster, I could arrest him.” Erza glanced down. “I need to go make a phone call.” She said walking past Jellal, but he grabbed her arm before she could get far.
“Wait.” He commanded. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Jellal asked. Erza turned to look at him, her eyebrows lowering. “Maybe we should try and handle this one ourselves.” He offered, his voice serious.

“But Jellal, if we’re alone…” She looked up. “We won’t have any back up, if something goes wrong.”

“I’m aware of that, but considering recent events… Maybe we should keep this quiet.” He explained. “We don’t need any more fires breaking out.” He added and Erza half smiled.

“He wouldn’t do that again, not right now at least…” Erza explained referring to Natsu, but Jellal’s grip on her tightened.

“I’m just saying… We don’t even know for sure, if anything is going to happen. Maybe it’s best to keep this operation under wraps.” Erza looked down, unsure about what he was suggesting. “Hey…” Jellal nudged at her, earning her eyes once more. His hand reached down and he took up hers in his. “You are the best back up I could ever hope for.” He said, bringing her hand up to his lips. Erza watched as his eyes closed, before planting a gentle kiss over her knuckles as she contemplating the whole thing. Then finally, he lowered her hand, his eyes opening again as he smirked at her.

“Fine… We’ll do this alone.” She stated firmly. “I need you to keep an eye on Banaboster for the next 72 hours.” She added and Jellal couldn’t help but keep his smirk at the commanding nature of her voice, as she turned away from him. Jellal reached down to grab his shirt, slipping it on over his head.

“You got it.” He stated. “You’ll be the first call I make.” He added while watching her walk away, "I’ll be the only call.” She added firmly, but she turned to face him and there was slight smirk on her face, and it only made Jellal’s widen.

It was silver smeared in red, stretching across his skin, pealing it right down to the tissue and leaving open wounds that wouldn’t stop bleeding. Gajeel yanked on, despite the shredding of his body. He gritted his teeth first, his eyes closing as he propelled his much smaller form forward. The tearing at his flesh was causing him to yell out, but it was more out of anger, than pain. He was on the high that was adrenaline, survival being the only objective that really mattered, despite the aftermath of his struggle and the condition it was reducing him to. He could hear the chains clinking together. He was lost somewhere between that and the sound of his own wildly screaming voice, but it wasn’t as loud as the words that kept repeating in his head.

Mind over body. They hissed, in that same infuriating voice, that was not his own, but of the man he most despised.

I am still alive to feel it! Gajeel’s mind was growling back. And I won’t let it control me! He could see that vile grin, practically laughing at him.

Then came the give, that last brutal tear. Blood was leaking down Gajeel’s arm as his hands and face fell to the concrete floor. He lay there, pushing himself up slowly with one arm, his throat parched from all of the screaming. His eyes glossed over and his face pale from the severity of his wounds, but there was no time to stop. There was no logical thought, only the instinct to run and so that was what he did. He pushed himself to his feet and began to search for an escape from that hellhole. His
eyes were darting around the dark room, that was illuminated by a glow of light blue.

Once you were gone, it became so much easier... Gajeel’s inner voice spoke as he thought back to that day.

Something cold and wet hit the tip of Gajeel’s nose, causing his eyes to finally open. He looked up, only to be met with the dark night sky, overcast in ashen gray clouds. They were snow clouds and it had been none other than a snowflake, that had hit him in the face.

Great... His mind spoke. That’s just what I need, as if it ain’t already cold enough out here. He thought, his rigid eyelids going back down. He was tired and hungry, not to mention a bit frost bitten. He had been sitting out there, for nearly twenty-four hours, just waiting for any sign of the arsonist in question to show up at the spot of the burnt down warehouse, but it wasn’t the first time he had done a stake out, so he was accustomed to handling it. Issue was, he hadn’t had an injured leg the last time. And sitting on the frozen ground for so long, was not doing him any favors.

Gajeel’s eyes opened as he glanced down at his hands, his fingers were curling up slowly, as he tried to recover the feeling within them. Snowflakes were falling all around him, the water of them, was settling over the leather of his jacket.

How much longer do I wait...? He wondered. If the arsonist doesn’t show himself by tomorrow, then chances are he is not gonna come at all... Gajeel’s eyes closed again.

Besides... They’re gonna start clearin’ this wreckage here soon... At least that was what they were sayin’ earlier today. He thought, as he remembered seeing some people on the site, inspecting it all in the wee hours of that morning. He had overheard them talking, while managing to stay out of view, as they spoke to police about what all they would be doing next.

Aw well... Gajeel thought, opening his eyes again. I’ll give it till noon tomorrow, if he doesn’t show by then... Then I’m outta here...

He began to smirk. First thing I’m gonna do is buy a burger, then sleep. He thought, wishing for that time to be now, as his stomach growled. His eyes were glossing over to the wreckage before him, taking in the devastation of ash covered metal. Now if only I could eat that stuff... Then this wouldn’t be a problem... His mind suggested longingly. Then he shook his head, as the realization of his own strange thoughts hit him.

Aw man... I must be so hungry, that I’m losing my damn mind... He was running a hand through his slick hair in distress, when the faraway sound of footsteps over gravel, came to his ears.

Gajeel immediately jumped to his feet at the familiar noise, withholding a groan from the stiffness that had built up in his bad leg at the sudden movement. He looked up, his eyes darting around the area for any sign of a person nearby and then he spotted something. Through the wreckage, just some ways off, nearly diagonal from where Gajeel was standing, stood a silhouette in the night. Gajeel could just make out the top of their torso, as they came near. Their form was standing out, among the gray clouds and then he smirked, gently reaching into his pants pocket for the feel of his brass knuckles.

“Finally... He’s here...” He spoke quietly, a toothy grin spreading across the whole span of his face. Gajeel then began to slink his way forwards through the dark, completely quiet as if he were nothing,
but a mere shadow in the night.

He was sneakily making his way around to the other side of the wreckage, using the longer path, so that he could then come up from behind the unsuspecting figure. The debris provided the perfect cover for his movements, as he kept his eyes over the other person who was making their way very slowly. Finally, he was within range, about ten feet away, hiding behind a wall of broken cinder block.

Gajeel turned; his back was going against the wall of stone that was just behind him, his eyes were closing gently. He was perfectly calm; this was something he had probably done well over a hundred times. Getting the jump on people was easy for him despite his large size; his devious ways seem to provide him with a knack for it. Hell, he did it to Levy nearly every time he saw her, just for the fun of it.

His lips were curling up at the memory of her tiny body stiffening, each time she felt his presence hovering just behind her. The way her shoulders would rise, before she would finally turn around and look at him with a displeased expression over her face. It nearly made him laugh just thinking about it.

His head angled down, as thoughts of Levy began to run rapid through his mind. His motivation suddenly so clear, that there could be no room for guilt even after seeing the trigger that was her kind eyes, in his head. She needed to be kept safe, no matter what the cost was to his own immortal soul.

Gajeel’s eyes opened, he had been waiting and listening carefully for the other person’s movements. So, he would then know the exact right time to act and now he could tell, that they had finally stopped walking. The fingers he had wrapped around the brass knuckles of his right hand, had stiffened up. His body was whirling forwards, quickly and quietly, through the falling snow. Any pain he felt in his troublesome leg, was once again being completely ignored, taking an immediate backseat to his work as he kicked himself into high gear.

Mind over body. He thought determinedly, as he bit down.

He made his way around the wall at a full out dash; his footsteps were surprisingly light, thanks to his increasing speed. The figure was standing tall, his back facing Gajeel’s oncoming attack, until they finally collided. Gajeel’s left arm went reaching around the man’s front, right around his neck and shoulders area. He was so fast that the figure barely had time to do anything in reaction to Gajeel’s crafty movements.

Gajeel had put him into a very secured headlock; his other fist was then driving into the temple, of his assailant’s skull. The metal digging in, as the man struggled with both hands over the tense muscles in Gajeel’s forearms. Gajeel then swiveled the metal into the man’s skin, as if he were giving him a noogie. Something that may have been considered a friendly gesture, if it wasn’t for the brutality of his armored fist.

“Well.” Gajeel growled between gritted teeth, his voice full of fury. “I thought I smelled somethin’ fowl in the air.” He added, his fist only digging deeper in, as the familiar voice began to groan out in slight pain. “I knew…” He then hissed into the man’s ear, his eyes narrowing in spite. “Somehow, I knew, it was you…” He added infuriated by that fact. “Salamander.” He finished as Natsu struggled.

“Black-Steel.” Natsu managed through a mangled voice, as he continued to try and pull himself free of Gajeel’s vise grip around his neck. His one eye was wincing as he tried to see the man who now, had his hold over him, but it was too hard to move.

The two of them continued to wrestle, Natsu’s movements becoming more erratic and desperate by
the second, but luckily for Gajeel he had some height over the Salamander, and that gave him a slight advantage for the moment. All he had to do was lift Natsu’s feet just high enough off of the ground, that Natsu not only lost leverage, but was also losing oxygen, as Gajeel began to mildly choke him out. Gajeel could hear him gasping a bit here and there, but his grip only tightened, as Natsu’s fight showed no signs of dwindling, despite the pressure he was applying.

“So…” Gajeel began, feeling cocky, but still pissed off. “You wanna tell me why ya burned down this warehouse? Huh?!” He asked, as Natsu spat and coughed a little. “See… I knew you were the one who did it!” He stated, with a slight jerk of Natsu’s head. “Since you’ve not only done it before, but also cause yer here, like a damn idiot, surveyin yer own damage!” Gajeel seethed as his arm wrenched Natsu back up, he seemed to be slipping from Gajeel’s grip, among their struggle. “Not to mention, I just had this feelin’.” Gajeel snapped. “Like I just somehow KNEW, even after all of this time, in my gut, that it was you… The fact that you’ve managed to get away from me in the past, just din’t sit right ya see… It made an IMPACT!” He growled angrily, with another wrench of his arm. “But not this time… So…” He muttered. “Ya better start talkin’!” He then raged. “Or else I’ll just suffocate you, until you pass out… And then I’ll just carry yer knocked out ass over to somebody, who believe it er not, is a LOT meaner than me…” He finally finished and then he fell silent, as the sound of strangled laughing met his ears.

Gajeel’s eyes narrowed in spite, as Natsu’s irritating voice mocked him, with the sound of his smug laughter.

“YA THINK THIS IS FUNNY SALAMANDER?!” He barked, about ready to strangle the life out of Natsu as he just wouldn’t shut up. “WE’LL SEE HOW FUNNY IT IS, WHEN YER A FUCKIN’ CORPSE!” Gajeel shouted, as he lifted Natsu even higher with a violent jerk, his body spinning them both around. He was seriously on the verge of losing his cool, when he could hear Natsu spitting what may have been words, if it weren’t for his lack of air. “WHAT?!” He snapped in question, loosening his grip just enough, so that Natsu could speak. There was a loud gasping sound, as Natsu swallowed the air like a fish out of water, and then a few more exasperated chuckles choked themselves out from his damaged pipes, before he finally began to speak.

“Is-” He breathed. “Is this how it started-” He had to huff some more. “With- Thibault?” He finally gasped out between rapid breaths, a grin over his face, despite being strangled.

*What the fuck*?! Gajeel’s mind was questioning in utter disbelief.

His eyes had widened upon hearing the name, his body freezing into absolute shock.

How would Salamander know anything about his attack on, Thibault?! What could any of it mean?! Did he know about Levy then, too?! Is that why he had left the calling card that looked like her tattoo?!

Gajeel couldn’t even think, his mind had just been blasted into oblivion, with these few simple words and now he needed to reprocess everything that had just happened in the last two days. Problem was, that wasn’t really an option at the moment considering his current predicament and Salamander knew that, and immediately took full advantage.

Gajeel’s grip over Natsu had loosened significantly, after being stunned into silence and Natsu took that as his cue to escape. His feet met the floor, his hands taking to Gajeel’s arm firmly. He bent his body over quickly, causing the much larger figure of Gajeel, to go up and over him. Thus, flipping Gajeel’s large frame right over his much smaller body, so that his back hit the graveled ground, hard.
Gajeel couldn’t move for a few seconds, after feeling the full impact of his own weight, what with all of the wind being knocked right out of him. Natsu’s head was just above him, still holding onto the one arm he had just used to flip him.

Now it was Gajeel’s turn to suck in the air, as Natsu let go of him and then he began to push himself up quickly, but he had to hesitate, as the pain in his leg was suddenly howling at him. He groaned, reaching for the spot of his stitches, to see if there was any blood. His head was turning from his spot on the ground, towards Natsu, who hadn’t decided to run, but instead only stepped a few feet away.

“What the hell?! That was too easy! What’s wrong with you Black Steel?! Yer talent slippin’?” Natsu questioned, with his arms folded and an arrogant smirk, that was somewhat similar to Gajeel’s own, but not as evil looking.

Gajeel turned back, slowly getting to his feet. He had to do it carefully, he could feel the stress on his stitches from the impact of his fall, but he was also very pissed off. Natsu tilted his head in confusion, as he watched Gajeel get up like an old man with a bad hip.

Gajeel was brushing his pants off, as he slowly turned to face, Natsu. His expression was angry, but not as angry, as Natsu had expected. It was almost as if something else seemed to be bothering him, getting in the way of his rage. Natsu could only watch in deep confusion, as Gajeel shot him a deadly look.

“How do ya know about Thibault!?” He barked, getting straight to the point, wanting to spare no more time on the witty banter. Natsu’s smirk was gone and his eyes narrowed in on Gajeel, his face looking more serious.

“Like you, I had a feeling.” He stated darkly. “Ya don’t just hear stories about men getting their faces destroyed too often, now do ya?” Natsu added, his eye making it a point to land over the brass knuckles still shielding Gajeel’s right fist, before his eye then went back up, to Gajeel’s face. “What I wanna know, is why?” He asked.

“Shut up Salamander! I’ll be the one askin’ the questions!” Gajeel spat, his body jerking forwards some, out of anger, but something seemed up. Natsu noticed how his one leg stayed planted and how his body, seemed to not be putting weight on the one side. “The calling card!” Gajeel continued, shouting in pure anger. “What does it mean!? You better fuckin’ tell me, now!” But Natsu just smirked, almost as if he wasn’t taking Gajeel’s threats seriously.

“I left that for Jose, and I don’t gotta answer anythin’ else, bout it.” He snapped, but then his head turned towards Gajeel in confusion. His eyebrows were lowering, as if something had just occurred to him. “How the hell do you know, bout it anyways ? You got some sorta tie with that bastard, er somethin’? Cause if that’s the case…” Natsu’s fist was crashing into an open hand in front of his chest, his knuckles cracking. “I’ll beat the livin’ hell, outta ya.” He spoke with a smirk.

“No!” Gajeel snapped. “You need to talk now! I ain’t playin’ games with you, you fuck head! I need answers!” Gajeel raged back, practically unhinged by the fact of his own words. He was feeling that desperation once again. That helplessness in the pit of his stomach, of not being able to keep Levy safe, if he could not understand why all of this was happening.

“And so, do I!” Natsu shouted back. “Why the hell were you here! Waiting for me?!”

Gajeel’s head turned away at that, his patience was completely gone and he no longer cared. He didn’t care about his leg, or the pain, or Salamander’s stupid questions. All he wanted now, was to make somebody hurt, blinded by the heat of his own rage, as he suddenly went running forwards. His armored fist making their attempt to collide with Salamander’s face, but Natsu was far quicker
than Gajeel gave him credit for, especially in Gajeel’s current condition.

Just as Gajeel was about to make contact, Natsu’s body instead ducked down and over, his leg coming out, for a low sweeping kick. Gajeel’s body jetted forwards with the motion of his arm, towards where Natsu had been standing, but then, was met with excruciating pain, as Natsu’ leg made contact right in the spot of his injury.

Then came the give. That last brutal tear, as Gajeel’s body fell to the ground, all of Levy’s work on him, instantly ruined. His stitches had ripped and the bleeding was starting, seeping through his pants, as Gajeel struggled to get up and off of the ground.

“What the?!” Natsu was uttering in bewildered confusion, as he watched Gajeel struggle to get up, after the blow. His eyes were widening, as he began to notice the blood. “What… Did I…?” Natsu looked down and then back up at Gajeel’s cringing face, in question.

“No, shut up…” Gajeel groaned. “I already had this, you just reopened it, fuckin’ moron…” Gajeel uttered, as he let out a seething breath of pain.

“Oh! Well why the hell would you try and fight me like that?” Natsu asked, his arm reaching towards Gajeel, his hand offering to help the injured rival up, but Gajeel only smacked his help away. “Really?” Natsu asked him in a skeptical voice. “You look like you can hardly move and you’re gonna deny my help? Yer the fuckin’ moron.”

“Fuck you, Salamander. All I want from you, is the answer about what I was asking you before. The calling card.” He snapped, his hands then going over the wound, pressing over it, in an effort to stop the bleeding. Natsu’s eyebrows lowered on Gajeel.

“I told you.” He stated. “It was a message for Jose. He’s made some enemies and that insignia is the flag of his coming defeat.” Natsu explained, as Gajeel looked at him with narrowed eyes, before then struggling to get up from the ground, as Natsu just watched. It took a moment, but he was finally on his shaky feet, all of his weight to one side, his body hunched enough, so that he could keep his hands over the wound. He then finally looked up at Natsu, who was just standing there, in wait.

“Yer lucky...” Gajeel stated gravely. “If this hadn’t happened, I’d be takin’ you with me and then the truth would come out... Looks like, you’ll be makin’ a second impact, after all.” He added with a slight smirk, but it was gone just as quickly, as it appeared. “Now get lost.” Natsu watched Gajeel for a moment in silence, before finally turning away.

“I expect a real fight next time.” Natsu then said from over his shoulder, before finally walking away, leaving Gajeel there, completely alone.

Gajeel watched Salamander’s form fade into the white blanket of falling snow. Then he looked to sky instead, it was really starting to come down, thick flakes all around him, landing over his face and melting upon contact with his skin. He could feel the chill of it; his breaths had now become visible puffs. The silence of it all, was deafening and familiar, as the pain of his leg continued to assault him, from where he stood.

Well... My phone is dead again, cause I’ve been out here so damn long... Came his mind. Can’t ride my bike in this kinda condition, so... A smirk was forming over his face, as he stared up into the eternal curtain that was the sky. It was decorated in spongy gray clouds, that leaked little specks of white towards him. Guess I’ll be walkin’... He thought, his eyes closing, as a distant memory suddenly resurfaced. Ain’t like I haven’t done that before...

He could see it in his mind’s eye and it made his smirk only grow. It was an image of himself, much
younger, struggling to walk outside, in the middle of the night with a furiously bleeding arm.

*Mind over body.* The words said, summoning that willpower to keep going, despite the excruciating pain. *You’re still alive to feel the pain, so that’s how you know to keep going…* That voice hissed.

Gajeel’s head lowered, his eyes opening and his smirk fading.

“Yep…” He spoke gently. “Time fer a very long walk…” He added almost humorously, as he began his shuffle forwards, through the snow. “I did it once… I can do it again… Cause this… This ain’t nothin’” He huffed.

*Because I have already conquered the true pain of life…* Gajeel’s mind thought, as his eyes narrowed. *And it became so much easier after that…* He thought, as he made his way, very slowly through the frozen gravel, and the cold.

He was once again, picturing the vague face of the man, whom he most despised, laughing at him, for the state he had landed himself in. The very same, whose vile voice was always berating his subconscious, like a damn scratched record each and every time he messed up, repeating the very same mantras.

The very essence of that person’s soul was running through Gajeel’s veins, like a virus, mixed into his own blood and Gajeel hated it. He hated his father more than any other human being, that had ever existed and ever would.

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Levy was walking through the snow filled streets of Magnolia that night. Her feet basically dragging as she made her way home, after working her weekly night shift at the school’s library. The hour was relatively late, because she had decided to stay there, even after she was done closing up the place, so she could study and do her homework while still being able to use the school’s computers.

Something she did quite often and tonight, she had especially needed the solitude. The peace of not having to work in the labs, provided her with a nice break away from everyone, so she could focus better on something that wasn’t her confusing life for a while. Her stress levels, compounded with the many cups of coffee she had drank that day, were most likely the only reason she had managed to stay awake, while she worked, considering how little sleep she was still running on.

She closed her eyes; she could feel the snowflakes melting over her rosy cheeks. She was so ready for rest, after nearly a full day of classes. She wanted nothing more, than to be home and warm in her bed, that was until she heard the distant sound of sirens.

Levy paused, her eyes opening up, at the far away sound. She waited, but it didn’t get any louder. Instead the noise only seemed to be fading away, which left her sighing in relief, as the scene had almost felt a little too familiar. The quietness, the snow, the hour and then the sirens… It was all beginning to feel like an exact replay of the night she had first met Gajeel, nearly four years ago.

Levy shook her head; her tired mind had inevitably landed itself right back in the place, she had been trying to avoid, but it couldn’t be helped. She was done, too exhausted to keep up the fight, as she stumbled slightly over a curve, thanks to Gajeel’s face, slowly easing its way back into her thoughts. Distracting her from her current surroundings.

She was just coming to a literal crossroads, when another memory of him was coming to mind. The one she had been thinking about earlier that morning, while shelving her books.
That night wasn’t the only time I ran into Gajeel, on my way home… And it wouldn’t have even happened the second time, if I hadn’t lost my books on that first night, in the alleyway… She thought, as she stood before the two roads, debating about which path she should take home. She looked to the right and then to the left, her eyelids lowering, as the snow made her shiver a bit.

It had been a long time, at least a year, since she had last taken the left path, even though it was the quicker road home. Even more so, after she had moved, but she had made a purposeful effort to avoid it; once she knew it would be taking her right past the building he lived in, as just another way to keep herself away from him and away from his breed of trouble.

Levy lifted her chin up high, before finally making her choice. No longer afraid, she chose to take the left road home, as she knew she no longer had a reason to try and avoid Gajeel. My time with him, is over… She thought, her eyes lowering as she began to walk through the piling slush. He made that clear before he left so… There’s no reason to go out of my way, to avoid him anymore… Not when he doesn’t ever plan on coming near me again, anyways… She thought, her fingers were curling up from the cold and from something else, as her head angled down. She was staring down at her own boots, as she continued to walk.

After a bit of walking with her head down, Levy realized she was slowly coming up on the place, she had been thinking about. The spot she had been mostly avoiding for the past few years or so, and now her mind was replaying the entire reason why. A particular building entrance was coming into view, as she approached. It was an old-fashioned building; designed to seem very fancy, with its clean looking brown bricks, that towered high. It also had decorative white frames, made of stone around each corner and window.

Levy could feel herself freezing up, as she remembered that night. Walking home alone in the cold, very much like she was now, but without the snow. She had just been making her way past the building, when it had happened. She had, had a feeling like she was being watched. She could feel herself slipping right back into the memory as she retraced those very same steps.

She was still. Her mind was on high alert, questioning everything that was around her with cornered suspicion, as something was clearly off. Something Levy couldn’t quite explain, but she could feel it weighing over her back, despite not truly knowing. Her feet were planted to the sidewalk, almost as if the soles of her shoes had melted into the concrete. Her apprehension was earned, by a sense of eerie foreboding. Somebody was nearby; somebody was watching her, from somewhere and she hadn’t any idea what to do about it.

Levy swallowed, she was trying her best not to tremble. To not show her fear visibly, but she was so unnerved. She had just been on her normal walk home from the school’s library, after working and studying there, that night. This was a path she took nearly every week, for almost a year, since around the time she had started her job in the school’s library. Halfway through her freshman term and not once, had this ever happened before.

If someone is truly there, behind me…. She gulped. Wouldn’t it be best for me to try and figure out, where exactly they are…? Or do I just run? She wondered. Her body was stiffening, as her eyes darted around, but she had yet to actually move.

It was a cold and crispy, fall night. She was wearing her usual winter coat; a school bag was draped over her one shoulder. She was standing in front of a narrow alleyway, as she had just passed by a really fancy apartment building, that she had come to admire the aesthetics of, each and every time she walked by it while on her commute home. The rest of the street was pretty brightly lit, even at
such a late hour and surrounded by other nice-looking buildings, so Levy had never had a reason to feel uneasy before that very moment.

No… If I run and they chase me… Then they will catch me, because I am by no means fast… Her mind admitted. I could just ignore it… She thought, but then… What if they follow me all of the way home? Then what? Levy closed her eyes; in an effort to gather her bearings, as all of the worst case scenarios had just started to run through her head, only putting her more on edge. No… She finally sighed. I have to try and look… I need to see who this person is… She had finally decided, without really having any idea if it was the right choice or not, but her mind was made up.

Levy opened her eyes; reluctant acceptance was etched all over her features, as she inhaled a sharp breath in preparation for what she was about to do. Then finally she whipped around, her small body spinning to face whatever it was that she could sense behind her.

At first, she saw nothing, but it took almost no time at all for her to realize that whatever it was, was coming from somewhere higher up. Levy’s eyes were slowly dragging their way up towards the alleyway, off to her left. Her vision automatically being drawn to something on the lowest level of a fire escape deck, hanging off of the side of the very same fancy apartment building she so often admired.

Her eyes widened, he was looking right at her. The red of his irises, were cutting through the darkness like a laser, a toothy grin was spreading across his face. Levy’s heart had jammed its way up into her throat, as she stood there, staring like she just couldn’t comprehend it.

“Ga-Gajeel…?” She uttered, in a shivery breath, as his lips closed, his grin becoming a smirk.

Levy’s eyes were squinting and her mouth was hanging open. She hadn’t seen Gajeel since that morning after he had spent the night with her roommate; nearly a month prior, and so she was starting to question if what she was actually seeing now, was real or not. That was until she finally saw him move. He was placing a hand over the railing of the fire escape, so that his legs could then kick their way right over it. His large body was sailing through the air, as he had jumped the rather large gap down from the fire escape to the ground.

Levy could only watch with her mouth still hanging open, until his large boots hit the ground with a thud, only a few feet away from where she was standing. She winced upon feeling the impact of his landing. He was slowly rising up from his bent kneed position, stretching back up to his full height and then looking down at her. He was wearing a pair of gray, worn out jeans, a hunter green T-shirt and a black leather jacket. He was also sporting a pair of fingerless gloves over his hands and he seemed to be holding something in one of them.

“I thought I might see ya here tonight…” Were the first words out of Gajeel’s mouth, but Levy couldn’t even respond for the moment, as she was still trying to get over the fact that he had shown up there and then jumped all of the way down from a fire escape.

“What’re you?!” She shook her head. “How?!” She started, her hand was then gesturing towards the fire escape. “And you just?!” But then, she had to stop, because Gajeel has started to laugh at her and that only made her more annoyed. “Don’t laugh at me! What the hell are you doing here, Gajeel?!” Her brow was lowering out of anger, as her hands fell back down to her sides. “You were waiting for me?! Wouldn’t you call that stalking?!” She questioned, her hands now settling over her hips.

“Whoa shrimp… Calm down…” He laughed. “I wasn’t followin’ you er anythin’ like that.”

“Then what the heck would you call it?” She challenged. “And what were you doing up there?” She questioned skeptically, with her arms folding and her eyes gesturing up towards the fire escape.
“You robbing the place or something?” She then asked, while her eye paid special attention to the object he was holding in his one hand. Whatever it was, it was concealed within a plastic bag, so she couldn’t tell.

“Gi hi, NO… If I was doin that, then I sure as hell wouldn’t have let ya see me.” Gajeel stated with another laugh.

“Mmm… I dunno Gajeel, you’ve been sloppy before…” Levy chimed. “I mean we did meet after all… Unfortunately…” She muttered that last part, her head tilting. Gajeel’s eyes were practically lighting up, as he looked at her. It was strange, it was almost as if he found her mean comments towards him to be sexy.

“Ha… Good one…” He stated, with a half-smile. “But no, din’t screw up this time. I actually live here.” Gajeel explained.

“Wait what?” Levy uttered, her eyes shifting up in the direction of the fancy building. “You…” She pointed to the place. “Live here? In this building?” She asked, in complete disbelief.

“Yep…” He answered simply.

“No way.” Levy stated, her hand dropping and her head shaking.

“Why not?” He asked. His studded brow was stretching back out of curiosity, for whatever her answer would be. Surely it would be something entertaining to him.

“This place?” She questioned, pointing at it once again. She looked away from him, her eyes settling over it. “I walk by here every week… I see the type of cars that pull up to the entrance… And the kind of people that walk in and out of it… And you’re one of them?” She asked. Her large golden eyes were now on him, again. “I just can’t picture it.” She told him honestly, but Gajeel just laughed at her, once again.

“Well ta be fair, I did come from the fire escape…” He reminded her with a head nod towards it. His smirk was spreading into a full out grin. “And also… I know…” He started. “I’ve seen ya around a few times…” He looked away from her. “I’ve noticed you always seem ta come by on the same night…” He added, trying to play if off, as if it was no big deal. Levy was looking him over, as he avoided her gaze. Her one eyebrow was lifting in question. She really hadn’t any idea what to say, as that was just strange to hear coming from him.

“Okay… And?” She asked expecting more. He turned his head back towards her; his eyes were doing another once over of her body, as he stepped forwards. Levy was becoming nervous; Gajeel was only about a foot away, looking down at her with a cocky smirk over his face. His hand was slowly reaching towards her, as he began to speak.

“If ya really don’t believe me… I could always show you…” His voice was sly; Levy was looking down at his large hand. “There’s a nice view of the street from my window…” He added, he was going to touch her; his hand was going towards her arm, his fingers were just starting to graze it. Luckily, she had on her coat, but Levy was still quick to back away from him.

“What are you doing?!” She asked him in alarm, looking up at him with red stained cheeks.

“Flustering you.” Gajeel answered bluntly.

“Well, stop it.” She replied. “I believe you, okay?” She added defensively and Gajeel just shook his head with another laugh.
“Sorry, I couldn’t pass it up…” He shrugged it off with a smirk, his eyes landing over her face again, as Levy rolled her eyes. “But fine, have it yer way, shrimp…” He added. His gaze was then averting elsewhere for a second. Levy was watching him, her brow coming together in confusion, as he was quiet for a second. “But listen…” He finally said, looking down. “The real reason I came out here, was ta give ya this.” He explained, as the hand with the object in a bag came out towards her.

Levy’s eyes looked at it for a moment, her brow shooting up in question as she reached for it with both hands, hesitantly at first. Gajeel was watching her as she looked back up at him, with a questionable expression.

“Go ahead.” He urged and so Levy finally took hold of the bag, it was rather heavy.

“What… What is this…?” She was questioning, as she stretched open the handles of the thick plastic bag, so she could look down inside. She could see a rather large, hard covered book in the bag. *No wonder it is so heavy,* she thought, her eyes inspecting it from inside the bag. Gajeel was watching her one thin eyebrow go up, until finally she looked back up at him, her mouth falling open.

“Intro to Psychology?” Levy questioned, completely perplexed. Gajeel nodded. “Yea actually… It’s yer book.” He stated, his arms folding. “It’s one of the ones ya left in the alleyway, that night.” He explained, but Levy was cutting him off.

“No…” Levy was shaking her head. “No, it’s not. I did have an Intro to Psychology book, but it didn’t look like this one… This looks new.” She said, her eyes glancing back down at the book, inside the bag.

“Not new… Just got it re-binded.” Gajeel stated, making Levy’s head snap up and look at him, with complete bewilderment. “The cover was ruined that night, from the snow, so I replaced it. The other books were too wet, to be saved.” He explained.

“So, wait… This was my book and you’re giving it back to me?” Levy repeated, her eyes narrowing, as if she still couldn’t quite grasp the situation

“Yea basically…” Gajeel answered, unsure of why she found his words so confusing. “So, take it… Cause I don’t want it anymore.” He then added, as Levy was reaching into the bag.

“And you’re giving this to me now?” She asked, glancing back up at him as he nodded. “But why? And after all of this time…?” She questioned, looking back down at the book; she had half pulled it out of the bag. “I mean… I finished that class last year Gajeel…. I don’t even need this anymore.” She explained, her eyes still looking over the book and its new binding.

“So what…” Gajeel replied with another shrug. “I’m still givin’ it back.” He added as Levy had started to open the front cover, of the book up. “Sell it, if ya gotta… I mean hell, I don’t care what ya do with it shrimp, but I definitely have no use for it and besides…” He had started to turn away from her. “It ain’t mine.” He finished, taking a few steps away. He was about to leave and be on his marry way, while Levy was busy inspecting the book, when she suddenly said something that made him stop.

“Gajeel Redfox…?” She questioned. Gajeel froze, his studded brow lifting as he slowly turned around to face her again, with both hands shoved into the pockets of his leather jacket.

“What…?” He asked, and then he noticed her looking at a piece of paper, that was left just inside the front cover of the book. She glanced up at him after reading it.

“Gajeel Redox?” She repeated the name with a questioning tone in her voice. “That’s what it says here on this receipt.” She showed him the paper. “That’s your actual name?” She then asked him
with a raised eyebrow, but Gajeel just turned back away from her at that.

“I don’t know what yer talkin’ bout.” He exclaimed, but in reality, his eyes were closing out of annoyance with himself for leaving that in there. He hadn’t meant to leave the receipt in the book.

“Oh… I see…” Levy replied. There was a knowing smile over her face, as she began to close the book and then drop it back down into the bag. She then looked up at Gajeel’s retreating form, her smile only growing. He had his head bowed and both of his hands still shoved into the pockets of his coat, as he slowly walked away from her. “Well…” She stated loudly so he would hear. “If you see this Gajeel Redfox character, please be sure to thank him for me, okay?!” She called as Gajeel’s head lowered a bit more, at the loudness of Levy’s voice.

“Yea, yea… Sure whatever.” He called back, not bothering to look, as he raised a hand up in acceptance for her gratitude. Levy’s smile only grew at his response and she couldn’t help but stand there, and watch him go for a minute. Her mind puzzling over the fact that Gajeel of all people, had done something that nice. And it wasn’t as if she had expected him to be mean to her, but she had certainly never expected *that* either…

She opened the bag once more, to look back down at the book one last time. Her eyes lit up, as she searched over it, her smile softening.

*Nope… Not in a million years…* She thought glancing back up at the far away form of Gajeel one last time, before finally turning the other way, to continue her walk home.

Levy paused. Her mind had just finished replaying the memory, of what had happened between her and Gajeel, in the very place she was standing now, but some years ago. She was just beside the alleyway, right past the fancy building Gajeel supposedly lived in, still trying to get over the residual effects of the memory, as she gathered her bearings.

She glanced down at her numb hands, rubbing them together as the snow continued to pile on the cement around her. It was so quiet, her skin was cold, her hair was becoming wet. Her breath felt raspy and her throat was stinging dry, as her head slowly came up.

She could feel it, the sinking numbness washing over, making her tingle all the way down to her toes. Her eyes widened and her chest pushed out, as she inhaled a heavy breath. Then finally she turned around, her eyes immediately moving upwards, towards the alleyway and it was almost as if she had somehow just known all along, that he would be there.

He was looking right at her. His expression was haggard, but his red eyes were glowing like a tiny flame shining right through the night and all of the snow, just to find her. His hand was settled over the railing of the fire escape deck, on the lowest level, just like in her memory. Except this time, the rest of his body seemed to be leaning on it for support, as something was clearly wrong. Levy’s eyes squinted in hopes that it would help her see him better through all of the thick falling snow.

“Gajeel…?” She questioned in complete confusion. Almost as if she were afraid, she was only still reliving the recollection of that night, that was until he moved.

His upper body leaned forwards, his hand still on the railing, but this time, instead of jumping over it, he toppled. His body wasn’t sailing through the air, it was falling.
Because once you were gone…

It became so much easier for me…

Gajeel could see the look of terror on Levy’s face, her eyes were shining, as she watched him fall.

To become the Monster… Gajeel’s eyes were closing.

NO…! Levy’s mind was gasping in pure mortification. Her heart had basically stopped beating within those few seconds, as she watched Gajeel’s large form go crashing all of the way down to the ground, faster than she could even move.

“Gajeeeeeel!” Levy screamed, her voice claiming the night, like winter’s strangled grasp over the fall.

Because I conquered the true pain of life on the day that you left…

Chapter End Notes

Breathe your smoke into my lungs,
In the back of a car with you I stare into the sun,
Still not too old to die young,
But lovers hold on to everything,
And lovers hold on to anything

I chase your love around a figure 8,
I need you more than I can take,
You promise forever and a day,
And then you take it all away,
And then you take it all away

Place a kiss on my cheekbone,
When you vanish me, I'm buried in the snow,
But something tells me I'm not alone,
But lovers hold on to everything,
And lovers hold on to anything

I chase your love around a figure 8,
I need you more than I can take,
You promise forever and a day,
And then you take it all away,
And then you take it all away

So lovers hold on to everything,
And lovers hold on to anything,
So lovers hold on to everything,
And lovers hold on to anything

I chase your love around a figure 8,
I need you more than I can take,
You promise forever and a day,
And then you take it all away,

I chase your love around a figure 8,
I need you more than I can take,
You promise forever and a day,
And then you take it all away,
And then you take it all away

“Figure 8” By Ellie Goulding
Scent

Chapter Summary

Gajeel remembers the words of his father. Levy makes a choice, but has to convince Gajeel to allow her to help. Jellal thinks of his past with Erza, as the two of them begin a potentially dangerous operation. Levy finds help, though some of it may be reluctant, because of who Gajeel is. Levy is forced to wait outside and be strong. Jellal and Erza run into trouble, so Jellal is forced to take action. A disturbing memory resurfaces, but it becomes Jellal's motivation to fight for his life. He leaves the symbol of victory for the cops to find, but now he is mia or potentially dead. Levy and Gajeel are reunited and Gajeel may finally have figured things out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 13: Scent

Gajeel’s brow was pushing together in question as he watched the large frame of his father stalk across the main room of their current living space. It was a tiny apartment made up of only two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom. The walls were off white and cracked, allowing the cinder block behind them to be visible. The floor was a series of dirty and broken tiles throughout the whole place. The bathroom was shared between everyone who lived in the building, as it was basically a boarding house. Gajeel didn’t much care for it, but that was okay considering he knew they wouldn’t be there for very long. They never seemed to stay anywhere for more than a few months.

Gajeel was sitting on the bed, which was really just an old springy mattress resting on the floor. His feet were bare; he was wearing a pair of baggy shorts that were far too big for him and no shirt over his lean torso. He got to his feet, standing at about four feet tall. His red eyes were scanning over the man’s giant boots, then up the length of his long legs. He was wearing a pair of dark jeans, with tears down the front. He had on a navy-blue shirt, with no sleeves, and some fingerless gloves over his hands. His name was Metalicana Redfox.

Gajeel took a step forward; he was watching Metalicana run a piece of cotton soaked in alcohol over the top of his tan forearm. His head angled downwards, several strands of iron gray hair were falling over his face. He put the cotton swab back down on the table and then began reaching for a large needle. His studded brow lowered, as he put it over the skin on his arm, focusing in hard, on what he was about to do, that was until he was interrupted.

“What ya gonna do with that?” Gajeel asked. His voice was full of youth, but it still had a bit of bite to it. Metalicana’s silver slit-like eyes flicked back up towards Gajeel; a tiny side smirk was forming
on his face.

“Just adding another stud, now that I finally got one.” He stated. His eyes were going back down, as he lifted up the opposite arm to show Gajeel the line of stud piercings that ran down it. “Gonna make them even on both sides.” His smirk was stretching into a full out grin, exposing his prominent fangs. Gajeel was stepping closer, his eyes were locked to the giant needle, that his father intended to stick into his own skin. “What of it…?” Metalicana questioned with another glance back up towards Gajeel, who was now standing only about two feet away.

“Nothin’.” Gajeel huffed, folding his arms and looking away dramatically, playing it off as if he didn’t care.

“You’re a rotten kid…” Metalicana muttered while still looking down, earning a slight peek from Gajeel. “Tryin’ to lie to me…” He finally looked back up. “Just say what you’re thinking.” Metalicana ordered. Gajeel’s mouth opened, but he still seemed hesitant. Not wishing for his tough façade to be broken. “Well… Out with it. C’mon.” Metalicana snapped in his gritty voice, he then looked back down at his arm. “It’s always better to be up front when you’re talkin’ to someone.” He added quietly.

“Fine…” Gajeel replied with annoyance, his arms unfolding. “It’s just…” He looked away again, his insecurity showing. “Aren’t ya afraid it’s gonna hurt…?” He finally managed while glaring the other way, but then all he heard was that same familiar laugh. Gajeel’s head turned, his ears reddening out of embarrassment at his father’s response. “Shut up!” He snapped his arms stiffening. “See! I knew I shouldn’t have asked! You always just make me feel so stupid!” He added. His arms were folding again and his head was going down, as if he were pouting.

“Nah… Just relax kid.” Metalicana answered, making Gajeel’s head go back up. “You are so high strung… I swear, there is no way you get that from me…” He muttered, looking back down. “Just listen… It does hurt.” He stated with a smirk, his eyes going back up. The two of them matched stares, as Metalicana lowered his head more to Gajeel’s level, almost as if he were telling him some kind of forbidden secret. “But this…” He pointed to the mark he had made n his arm with the needle. “This pain is nothing.” Gajeel’s eyes were looking towards the large needle in his hand, before looking back onto his father’s arrogant face, in confusion. Metalicana paused for a few seconds, allowing Gajeel to take in his words before he continued. “Ya see… I’ve learned to not let something like a little bit of pain, be a factor in controlling what I do.” He added straightening back up, as he began to push the needle back into his skin. Gajeel was shaking his head in confusion, as he watched the blood begin to pool out of his father’s arm in the form of a small blotch.

“But how..?” Was all he could manage to ask as he stared, mesmerized by what his father was doing to his own arm.

“Mind over body…” Metalicana replied glancing up with a grin, before looking back down. “It’s somethin’ you can teach yourself…” He added, as he set down one of the needles. He was reaching for some plyers, picking up the stud on the table. “The only true pain of this world is born out of love Gajeel.” He stated. Metalicana’s eyes had once again found Gajeel’s. His stare was hard, but his smile never faded.

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*The only true pain of this world is born out of love...*
Gajeel could still hear the words resounding through his mind; his brow was pushing together in confusion. His eyelids were slowly lifting; he could see her large gold irises searching over him. Her expression was panic ridden and on the verge of tears. Disarray strands of wild blue hair were twirling towards him from above, as her small frame hung over him, teeming with anxiety.

Levy… His mind spoke her name, as his lips automatically curled up at recognition of her face. It was slowly starting to come back to him, where he was and what had happened, but for the moment he just stayed focused in on her presence, and the fact that he was finally getting to see her again.

“I must be dreamin’…” He uttered in a scratchy voice. His eyes closed and his smile never faded. “Cause there is no way this is real…” His eyes opened lazily, his one arm was moving. It was painful, but he could still manage. He was reaching up towards her with a large shaking hand.

Levy was quivering just as much as him, if not more. Her eyes closed gently as Gajeel’s large palm settled over her white skin. A tear was running down her face as she reopened them, her expression was distraught.

Upon touching her, Gajeel knew she was indeed actually there. He could feel the warmth of her flushed cheek, as his hand cradled it and he took comfort in knowing that, that meant she was alive and safe.

“What ya cryin’ for shrimp…?” He then asked.

He looked so tired, like all he wanted to do was sleep and never wake up. His skin was paling and there were heavy bags under his eyes. Levy rested her own tiny hand, over the gloved hand Gajeel had settled over her face, his skin was cold to the touch. The tears would not stop flowing down her cheeks. She was still shaking; her breathing rapid and coming out in visible puffs of air, due to the cold.

“You’re an idiot!” She gasped in a voice, thick with tears. “Throwing out lines at a time like this!” Levy’s eyes closed again and her head angled down as she nearly choked on a sob, she was keeping in. She knew Gajeel could feel her quivering with his hand and that this gesture, was just his way of trying to bring her comfort, but if anything, it was having the opposite effect, because it only made her feel guilty. Guilty for being the person to emotionally fall apart, while he was the one lying on the cold ground, in so much pain.

Her inner resolve was breaking apart once more, just as it had been since the moment he had originally disappeared from her apartment, and she loathed herself for that reason. She couldn’t stand always being the weaker person, just like her small frame suggested and yet she knew, she only had herself to blame. Just once, why couldn’t she be the stronger person and handle a situation, without becoming a complete and utter mess?

I wanted to see you again Gajeel… But not like this… She admitted forlornly to herself. Her eyes were still closed tightly; her deepest insecurities were torn wide open, just like the gaping wound in Gajeel’s leg. Scavenging what was left of her confidence, until there was nearly nothing left and she couldn’t even think straight, because of it. She was too busy drowning in panic, over seeing him in such a state. That was until she heard Gajeel let out a restrained laugh. Levy’s eyes opened wide at the familiar sound.

“Gi Hi… Yer definitely real.” He was eyeing her down lazily and with a toothy, lopsided grin. She looked back up at him, with a disbelieving expression over her face, because she couldn’t fathom how he could possibly be smiling and laughing at her, at a time like this. “Now I know it fer sure…
Callin’ me an idiot…” He closed his eyes. “That is such a Levy thing to do…” He murmured. The tear dripped from Levy’s face onto his cheek. He blinked, his eyes opening up again, slowly.

“What happened Gajeel?!” Levy demanded, her voice was cracking with emotion, her grip over his hand had tightened. She was trying her best to think clearly, after hearing how weak his voice was becoming. She needed to keep him talking and conscious. Reality had firmly draped its weight back over her shoulders and she knew there could be no more time wasted on dwelling over her own shortcomings, when he was in such need of her help. “You have to tell me where you feel pain!” She added desperately, but Gajeel’s smirk was disappearing at her words; his hand was slowly falling away from her face, Levy’s hand stayed over his for the moment. His facial expression, was changing to one of worry and a mixture of agony.

“Levy…” He began more seriously. His body was shifting up and off of the ground, but he was cringing with the movement of it. His brow was pushing together, from the extreme pain. Levy stiffened as she watched him struggle to get up.

“No… Gajeel don’t move…” She ordered, bracing over him. “We don’t even know the extent of your injuries yet!” She added hastily, as he ignored her and continued to push his upper body up more, between heavy groans. “Moving could further damage-”

“What am I spose ta do… Wait for 911… Can’t just sit here, Levy…” Gajeel finally interjected, glancing towards her, as he continued to pant from the strain of all his labored movements. He immediately felt guilty upon catching her eye, as he knew she was only trying to help. Problem was, he knew she shouldn’t be involved anyways.

“Listen…” He breathed. “S’okay…” He huffed, gaining her eyes back over his face. “It’s just… I’m sorry…” He uttered weakly. Levy froze, she was staring at him with misunderstanding. “Levy I… I tore the stitches… I’m really sorry… I know you worked hard-” He breathed out. Her eyes were averting upwards as he spoke, and she just shook her head. Silent tears had started to stream down her cheeks again, her face reflecting them in the night.

“That doesn’t matter!” She exclaimed, looking back down at him with red glossy eyes. Gajeel was returning her expression, with something akin to alarm. “I don’t care about that!” She added, her voice weakening again.

Her hand was reaching for him, going to his chest lightly in an attempt to steady him. Gajeel glanced down at the small hand she had over him, his eyes still wide with disbelief. His mind was in utter confusion over her response, to this news about his stiches as he had fully expected for her to completely chew him out over it. She had basically promised him that she would, after all. She was looking at him with a somber expression carved into her features, before she spoke again.

“Just tell me why… Why were you up there, Gajeel?!” She questioned, still clearly outraged. Gajeel’s teeth clamped down tightly, at this question. His one arm was reaching for the area where his stitches were. He was still trying to shift his body up more, but he found moving any further to be extremely difficult, for whatever reason. It was almost as if his arm had stopped working.

“I was tryin’ to get home…” He groaned and then he cringed, after finally managing to shift his torso further up. He was now finally, sitting all of the way up, but something was most definitely off. “Without bein’ seen.” He took a heavy breath. “Cause I was bleedin’ again.” He glanced down at the spot where his stitches were, Levy did too. The blood had once again, soaked through the fabric of his jeans and it looked bad.

“Arhh…” Gajeel groaned loudly again. His one hand was reaching for the opposite shoulder. He could feel it now; it was hitting him with a brutal wave of pain as the muscles in his one shoulder
would not stop tensing and releasing violently, over and over again. They were spasming beyond belief. “Shit!” He hissed. Levy was looking at the one shoulder he was reaching for with wide eyes.

“What, what is it?!” She demanded in alarm.

“I think I dislocated it.” His body rocked forwards, as he said this. His nose wrinkled and his teeth once again, slammed down. “It hurts like hell and I can’t move my upper arm…” Gajeel growled. Levy reached forwards, but she didn’t actually touch it, out of fear of hurting him even further.

“You fell on it.” She confirmed in a serious voice. She was looking him over, her eyes hastily scaling over his whole body. “God… Gajeel…” She whimpered with another shake of her head. Her heart was still beating so fast. “You’re lucky you didn’t break your neck! You could have died from a fall like that!” She exclaimed. “Do you feel pain anywhere else?!” She then asked. “Can you tell, yet?” Her voice was attempting to even out, but it still carried a sense of panic. Gajeel glanced down at his same arm, with the bad shoulder.

“Just… The whole damn thing…” He growled back, as he braced the arm with his bad shoulder tightly. “My whole fuckin’ arm on this side… fuck!” He cursed the last part, as his hand then reached for his opposite shoulder. protectively.

He was hissing in pain, as Levy stared at it, a deep frown embedded over her face. She was quiet for the moment, as she continued to look him over, again. She was eyeing his shoulder and down the length of his arm. Then her eyes would dart even further down, towards the blood in his pants from the torn sutures.

It’s too much… She thought. Her mind was beginning to panic. I-I can’t help him this time… I can’t, I can’t do all of this… She knew she was way out of her league, with his injuries piling high and his stab wound being at such great risk for infection now that it had torn open again. There was no way, he could get away with not going to the hospital again.

She looked up to Gajeel’s cringing face, as he stared at his arm and held it tightly. There’s no way he will go for it, though… She thought, with a sigh of worry as she remembered all of the times, she had harassed him about going to the hospital the night before. How he had fought with her, on every front. Confirming what she had already secretly known all along, but hadn’t been willing to deal with, at the time… Gajeel was a criminal and he couldn’t go to a hospital. He lived his life discreetly; people didn’t know who he worked for or who he really was and it needed to stay that way.

Levy shook her head; the hopelessness was once again wanting to settle back in, so then what could she do? She needed to help him. Not only just for his sake, but because she wanted to. Seeing him like this, was breaking her. She had always known Gajeel to be strong. A force all his own, but he had been borderline delirious after his fall and that, was more than just a little disturbing. It was downright chilling for her to witness him like that.

Her eyebrows lowered, as she thought about her options. No hospital, no more at home surgeries, so then what? Was there maybe, somewhere else she could take him? If she could maybe just get him somewhere, to somebody who could handle injuries of this scale; someone who had all of the proper tools at their disposal…

Levy’s eyes were widening, as such a person was suddenly dawning on her. Somebody she knew she could trust. Somebody who unfortunately, was actually located at a hospital, but would most likely still help her and keep it a secret, if they understood how important it was.

That’s it… I can take Gajeel to her… Levy thought. She won’t be happy, but I know deep down she cares… Levy’s eyes were glancing down towards Gajeel’s good arm and she subconsciously began
to reach for it. Her mind basically already made up. She knew the person she was thinking of, would never turn someone who was hurt this badly, away. She was a kind-hearted individual, despite her tough exterior and that was why Levy was certain she could count on her to help Gajeel, no matter who he was.

Levy moved quickly, not wanting to waste any more time while Gajeel was still in so much pain. Gajeel looked to her with a questioning look on his face, as she wrapped both of her tiny hands around his good bicep, in an attempt to help him stand up.

“What are ya doin’ shrimp?” He huffed in a breathless voice. Levy hesitated some under his half-lidded gaze. His head was lowered from exhaustion, but his red eyes stayed firmly planted on her. Some of his wild dark mane was falling over his face. And he looked clammy and so disheveled, but at least he was in the right mind now.

*But that means he won’t go for it…* Levy thought. *As soon as he knows, we are going to a hospital, he will refuse… Then what?* Gajeel was still watching Levy with a questioning, yet tired look. Her small hands were still on him, and her mouth fell open and she returned eye contact with him. She was trying to think on her feet, Gajeel could see the shift in her eyes, as she pondered a quick solution to whatever internal dilemma she was having.

*Maybe I just won’t tell him…* Her eyes finally shifted down and off of him, at that. *No…* She then thought. *I’ve got to be honest…* She decided, as she matched eyes with him once more, her mind finally made up. *Gajeel might be the only person I can be honest with right now, anyways…* What a strange thought, that was to realize.

“I’m…” She hesitated. “I’m taking you to a hospital.” She finally managed, once she gained the courage. Gajeel opened his mouth to retort, but Levy was quick beat him to it. “And before you say anything!” She snapped. “This isn’t going to be a normal hospital visit.” She explained looking down. “I know someone who works there… Someone who has means to help you and be discreet about it.” She finished, making eye contact with him once again, before looking down at her own hands, still wrapped around his bicep. “So, come on, we’ve got to go.” She finally urged. Her small body was moving, as if she were about to pull his weight up with her, once she got to her feet.

“You’ve got to stand Gajeel; I can’t carry you.”

“No, of course not. Why the hell would you even try?” Gajeel asked, his studded brow was lowering, along with his voice. Levy looked to him with confusion, as Gajeel of course, hadn’t budged.

“Well… Because you’re hurt…” She stated, as if he legitimately didn’t know and because, she didn’t understand what he was getting at.

“So?” Gajeel questioned sternly, his voice raspy with both pain and frustration.

“So…?” Levy repeated uneasily, her eyes shifting elsewhere. Here it was, he was being difficult, just as she had expected. “Gajeel I told you I… You need to trust me.” She begged. “I promise you, this person won’t-” She continued desperately, but she was soon interrupted.


“I do!” He barked, becoming angry, his gaze fierce. They both paused, staring at one another and
Levy looked caught off guard. Gajeel glanced away, his face looking guilty for the second time that night. “Damn it Levy!” He cursed with a hiss of pain. “I do trust you! Fuck…” He growled, before continuing. “But we can’t do this again! Don’t ya see?” His voice was finally calming some. “I don’t want you to help me… This isn’t yer problem. If anythin’ you need ta just get the hell outta here, before someone walks out and sees us!” He snapped, finally looking back up at her, as he held his shoulder tightly.

Silence fell over the pair once again. Gajeel was still sitting there, in his position on the snowy ground, as Levy stood just before him, only a few feet taller than him even while he was sitting. She was looking down at his face, to hold up her end of their stare. A cold breeze was blowing over the two of them. Levy could feel the icy water, seeping into her boots.

God damn it… Gajeel was cursing internally, his eyes were closing out of frustration. Why was this so hard? The scent of winter was drifting off of Levy, as her small form stood in such close proximity to his and here they were… Facing off, once again and it was all just… Too familiar.

“How can you say that?” Levy finally asked, breaking the silence. Gajeel’s eyes opened back up and he once again, looked back up to her face. Her voice had sounded rattled, like she was trying to keep her anger at bay. “After everything… After all that we went through?!” She cracked, chipping away at whatever bit of patience she had left. Her tears had already returned with a vengeance. “And you expect me to just leave you here?!” She exclaimed, completely outraged. “I can’t do that! I’m the one who stitched you up, Gajeel!” She cried, visibly upset.

“And I was bein’ reckless, Levy!” Gajeel threw back, becoming equally upset. He couldn’t do it. He just couldn’t remain calm; it was all just too much. “Jus like ya told me not to be!” He added hastily. “I got into a fight with somebody! And they kicked me good, right here in the leg!” His hand hovered over the blood, as he eyed her deliberately. “This isn’t yer fault Levy!” He exclaimed, his voice equally desperate now, as he practically pleaded with her to see reason. His head was shaking. “And I ain’t doin’ this again, I’m not pullin’ you in like that again. Ya hear?!” He raged back. “Do ya understand?! So now ya just need ta get up and walk away, like ya never even saw me here!” He was yelling and pointing. His anger seemed to be feeding him energy, but Levy’s head was also shaking in response.

“No!” She snapped back. Her voice sounded upset, but she was more stubborn than angry, at this point. “I can’t do that! You can’t ask that of me Gajeel, it isn’t fair!” She was cracking again; her eyes were like glass, from all of the tears. She paused, glancing away in an attempt to hold it together. She took a quick shuttering breath, before lowering her body back down to his level. Gajeel was so amazed by it, that he was actually stunned into silence, as her face came near his.

“So Please… Gajeel…!” Her voice had lowered some, but she still sounded so distressed. Her words were coming out, mangled with weakness. “I can’t just leave you here… Please…!” She reached for him, her hand was going to his shoulder and then she swallowed back, to keep in a sob.

It was happening, she was actually begging him… Again.

“Gajeel… You’re hurt bad…. Please don’t make me walk away from you like this. I couldn’t bare it, knowing this happened to you…” She uttered in a weak voice that was on the verge of breaking. He looked to her with wide eyes, like he just couldn’t understand what was happening. He could feel her tears agonizing him from somewhere deep inside and then she was speaking to him again. “I know someone…” She whispered. “Like I told you…” Her hand went from his shoulder, to back up to his face. Her warm fingers were grasping his one cheekbone gently. “I know someone who can help…” She added quietly. “And I promise… I promise they won’t tell…” Her large glossy eyes were locked to his. “So please… Let me take you there… You have to trust me, again…” She
pleaded. Her eyes were searching his face, with warranted desperation.

Gajeel stared at her, his own eyes were stinging and his throat was closing up, just like the night before. He felt like he wanted to cry, *again* and he just couldn’t even speak. Why did she always do this to him? Instead, all he could do was swallow, glance down and nod his head, as Levy’s hand moved off of his face.

He did trust her, completely. That was the truth and maybe he shouldn’t have, but he knew deep down, that she meant him no harm. That she was completely sincere, because this was Levy and she was far too good a person. Looking away, finally allowed Gajeel the strength to match eyes with her again, though he had felt the sting, no tears came to his eyes.

“Fine…” He choked out in a raspy voice, at last. Levy pulled away from him some at that and then once again, she began taking hold of his good arm.

Gajeel was watching her, his mind puzzling over all of it. Over her, over himself. Why was it so incredibly hard for him to say no to her? Why did she bring those same emotions out of him? Ones, such as guilt and sadness? Twice now, she had almost made him cry and that wasn’t something he *ever* did. He couldn’t help, but think about his conversation with Juvia… These feelings, whatever they were, love or not bothered him, because they were making everything harder. Harder to stay away, harder to resist Levy, harder to not feel complete joy each and every time he laid eyes on her, and she was safe.

The two of them were moving slowly and together, Gajeel was shifting his weight. Levy was pulling him up, his legs though shaky, were moving. He groaned a lot and it was painful, incredibly painful. His shoulder and arm were most definitely fucked up on the one side, and then on the other side of his body, were his torn and bleeding stitches. Not to mention he hadn’t hardly slept or eaten anything in over twenty-four hours. He was a freaking mess, but at least he was finally on his feet again. With Levy under his one arm, her arm around his back for support, just like the night before.

“How do you feel?” He then suddenly heard her say, pulling him out of his thoughts again. Gajeel paused as he then noticed her glancing up at him slightly. There was a tiny smile over her face. “I’ll be the one to save you, instead…” She added gently, before finally looking away. She was looking forwards again, so she could continue to help him move.

She was such a tiny thing, and so stubborn. Why she wanted to help, was beyond him. Even if he might have feelings for her, there was no way she could possibly feel even remotely, the same right? He certainly didn’t deserve it; he didn’t deserve her, so then why? Why was she doing all of this…? Why couldn’t she just walk away?

“Where we goin?” He finally asked with a deep, but soft voice.

“Do you remember what I said? This way…” She pressed gently, guiding him with her usual grace still firmly intact.

*It’s because she is such a good person… Just like Juvia said… That’s all…* Gajeel thought as he watched her from the corner of his eye and they were finally walking again.

Her nose was red and he could hear her sniffling. Her cheeks were puffy from all of the tears she had
just shed on his behalf.

_Levy you are far too kind, too kind for yer own good… There is no reason fer you, ta be cryin’ over someone like me…_ He thought as he watched her still. His head angled slightly towards hers. His steps were clumsy, his weight falling quickly, making his nose nearly touch the damp hair atop of her head. He was in so much pain, but something was sticking out in his mind, above all else.

“You smell like snow…” He told her gently, as he attempted to lift some of his heavy weight, off of her small frame in relief.

“Snow doesn’t have a smell, Gajeel…” She answered back with a soft voice. Her eyes still focused down on their feet, as she continued to help them forwards.

“Yes, it does…” He replied matter-of-factly, as his eyes closed in remembrance of the first time he had breathed in that same scent. It was on a winter’s night, nearly four years ago. The night he had met her.

The girl with the long scarlet hair; so beautiful and yet she always looked so sad. Jellal had learned her name. It was Erza… and he couldn’t help but watch her, each and every time she was nearby. She hadn’t been going to his school for very long, as she had recently been adopted by a young couple that lived in the neighborhood. The Belserions.

Most everyone stayed away from her, despite knowing the family well, because they lived in such a small town. Jellal however, would contemplate her presence daily. She would walk around so calmly and yet he couldn’t help but suspect an inner chaos brewing from somewhere deep within her. That girl was full of secrets… He was sure of it, because how else could he explain her? Her very image would demand so much attention, and yet everyone ignored her still. It was her somber demeanor that kept them all at arm’s length, it completely screamed against any and all company. Jellal found the whole situation just a little too contradictory for his liking. She was always alone and he had never even so much as heard her speak, despite sitting right next to her, in third period.

One day he decided to ask her for a pencil, just as a test to see if she would actually speak to him, but unfortunately it didn’t pan out in the way that he had hoped.

He had sat there in wait, his dark eyes over her face. Her expression was so mundane, but her stare was fierce as it matched his own, before she finally just reached over and handed him the pencil without a word. He had taken it with an embarrassed gesture of thanks, before finally looking away.

He had then stared down at the pencil in his hand, his mind pondering what her face would look like, if she were to smile… Just once. He had decided right then; he would make it his mission to find out.

His friends were against it. Wally had told him not to bother. She was ‘way out of his league anyways’, he had said. Millianna had insisted that the girl was just too off putting, to approach. Something along the lines of her always having a frown over her face. Sho had called her scary, he was far too intimidated to try and speak to her himself. And then there was Simon. He also seemed to have an interest in the pretty red-haired girl who never spoke, but he was far too shy to do anything about it and so, it was all on Jellal’s shoulders.

He remembered the first time he had finally heard her voice. It was so kind, much nicer than he had ever imagined. She had thanked him for accompanying her on a silent walk home. He had stood
there dumbfounded as she walked towards the front door of her house. She had then turned around to look at him uneasily, one last time, before disappearing inside.

What a strange look she had given him, he had thought. He had never seen her look nervous, before that day.

It took some time, but they were soon conversing every day. It was just small talk at first, but Jellal didn’t care. He couldn’t help but smile, each and every time, she would so much as open her mouth. He was starting to see that she really wasn’t as insecure, as he had originally thought. She had just gotten used to being alone all of the time. Well not anymore… Jellal made sure of that.

She was very intelligent; he could see that now. She had good instincts and she paid attention in school. She took accurate notes and she did very well in her studies. She was also very sincere and confident in her own opinions, and she had little to no problem in sharing them, once she got to know and trust a person.

It actually surprised Jellal how outspoken Erza could be, that was until the two of them would reach her house at the end of each day... She would then always become strangely quiet, once they got close. Her steps would slow down and her posture would stiffen. Jellal would always hang back by the end of her driveway, as she walked up to the house so mechanically. It was so peculiar and unsettling, and he couldn’t understand why for a very long time.

Once she would reach the door, she would then always turn, to send Jellal one last daunting glance, before finally heading inside. Just like the first day he had walked her home and that bothered him. He didn’t know what it meant, but he was starting to realize that something was indeed wrong. Maybe the Belserions weren’t as nice a family, as everyone had originally thought they were?

It troubled him. Jellal was beginning to lose sleep over it.

As the years wore on and they grew up, he had become much closer to her. Erza had become an integral part of his group of friends and he would soon find himself spending as much time with her, as they could get away with. Sneaking out at night, meeting up whenever possible. He didn’t want her to ever be alone, any longer than she had to be, because he had become afraid for her. Terrified that she would one day shatter right before his very eyes and he wouldn’t be able to stop it, but she was strong… Far stronger than he was giving her credit for, but she still needed to get away.

Away from them, away from that house. The bruises were getting harder and harder for her to hide. The injuries were becoming far worse and things were just spiraling out of control.

“I think I’ll change my name…” She announced one day, as the two of them sat on a hill, one late night at the park. Jellal looked to her, she was smiling, but her one eye was also dark and swollen. She had admitted, that she was having trouble seeing a little on that side, now.

That expression he had yearned so badly to see over her lovely face, as children, he now so often did. Basically, anytime they were together and she wore it so perfectly, despite the bruises and yet, he couldn’t help, but be pained each and every time he saw it. He would still always smile back, because no matter what, her presence still always put him at ease.
“Oh yea?” He replied looking up towards the sky. A warm summer breeze was gracing their faces.

“Yep… That will be the first thing I do, I think… Whenever I leave this town.” She answered, as she too looked to the sky. They would often talk about running away, but it was all just mindless dreaming. They had no means to actually get anywhere, they were far too young, only teenagers.

“What will you change it to? Have you given it any thought?” He asked, glancing back over to her. Her scarlet hair was raising from the wind. She gently pushed it back behind her ear to keep it in place, before looking back down at her hands this time. Her fingers were fiddling together with uncertainty.

“I’m not sure…” She answered gently, the hair behind her ear was already falling out of place. Jellal watched her, his hand then reached up to stroke the hair, that had fallen out of place, back behind her ear again.

“How about Scarlett. Erza Scarlett.” He spoke softly, his hand falling away as Erza turned her head to look at him with amazement. “That way… I’ll always be able to find you… No matter where you end up… All I’ve got to do, is remember your pretty hair and then I’ll remember your name…” He added lightly, as she watched him at a complete stand still. He could swear she was blushing, but it was hard to tell in the dark.

Later that night, he walked her home. Once they got to her house he hung back, just like he always did and then he watched her go. She opened the door and then turned to look at him one last time, just like she always did. She was smiling, but her eyes looked so sad. The bruise was hard for him to ignore, it made his heart ache.

Why do I…? Jellal’s eyes narrowed, as he continued to watch Erza turn away. Why do I feel so helpless…? Like… Like I’m letting her just walk away… Needlessly, into danger? He thought, as she finally disappeared behind the door. His eyes closed and his head lowered in shame. His stomach was turning with discomfort, as it always did.

Freedom truly does not exist in this world… And nothing has changed. Jellal thought as he closed his eyes and let out a seething breath of frustration. The memory was fading out, just as quickly as the air from his lungs, because there she was. Erza Scarlett, dressed to kill. Not literally, but figuratively, because she looked damn good.

She was wearing a form fitting purple dress with a rose pattern, that extenuated all of her curves perfectly. It had a small window, leaving little to the imagination about the size of her bust, and a high slit on the bottom left side of the dress, to reveal the whole length of one of her toned legs. Which worked out, because she was able to keep her gun and badge holstered to the other one, hidden beneath the dress. Her scarlet hair was tied up and she was wearing a pair of long white evening gloves, over her hands. Lastly, she had on a long evening coat draped over her shoulders, to keep her skin warm against the cold, as it was still mildly snowing outside.

Jellal could see her, a little ways off from where he was taking cover, near a parking garage. Just outside of the flashy building known as the Twilight Ogre Casino, and it was making him uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable, to see her dressed that way for what they were about to do.

“Don’t you think, you’re over doing it a little?” He questioned, speaking into the small microscopic mic he was holding between two fingers.
“Why do you say that?” Came Erza’s voice in response to his question, from the small device in his left ear.

Jellal rolled his eyes, of course she didn’t get it… She never seemed to understand that no matter how capable of a woman she was; he would always still worry about her in situations like this.

“Just…” He was pinching the bridge of his nose. “Be careful…” He sighed.

“Are you done?” He heard her ask impatiently. “Did you get it out?” She asked. “Or was there something else?” She questioned and this made Jellal smirk knowingly, as his hand dropped away from his face.

“Yes, there is actually.” He replied still smiling.

Erza’s eyes were circling up and over the red and green doorway of the Twilight Ogre Casino, before her. The entrance was grand, practically ablaze in the night, with red and green flashing lights. The exterior of the building was one of a feudal Japan looking design, with a modern-day twist and a large smiling Ogre head, just below the sign.

People were filing in and out around where Erza stood, all wearing equally fancy attire. She discreetly adjusted the small device hidden in an awkward position on her person, for about the hundredth time that night. Still standing in her same position, with high heels on and waiting for Jellal’s response, before moving forward with their plan. It was an undercover mission, or so she had decided, after she had received the call from Jellal.

Banaboster Goodrich, owner of the casino, who should have been laying low, because Jose was more than likely after his head, was instead holding an extravagant event at his place of business. One that involved a lot of alcohol and beautiful women, at his own beck and call. It was careless, and attention seeking, and probably just about the dumbest thing he could do right now, considering his current situation, involving a certain powerful crime lord.

The man was basically begging to be killed. Putting himself willingly, under the influence and inviting hundreds, upon hundreds of people to come and party with him… It was only a matter of time before someone unannounced showed up to put an end to Banoboster’s party, as well as his life. And that was why Jellal had almost immediately made the call to Erza, once he understood what all was going to be going down that night.

What Jellal hadn’t counted on, was for Erza to decide that the best course of action would be, for her to dress up and attend said party, as another one of Banaboster’s evening girls. Just to keep a close eye on him, of course.

In fact, he hated that plan altogether, but Erza had insisted that it was the safest choice, because it was ‘too crowded’ she had said. And because ‘someone needs to be inside and that can’t be you, for obvious reasons.’ Referring to his current fugitive status with police. ‘Plus, I’ll be right there and ready to make the arrest’ she had added, completely pleased with her plan, as if she couldn’t have come up with a better idea if she had dreamed it up in her sleep.

Jellal had just shook his head at the plan, though this was over the phone, so to be fair. Erza hadn’t actually seen him do it. He was then quick to voice his concern about her being too close to the danger without his help, but of course, she hadn’t been afraid. She was far too stubborn and perhaps a little too brave, but he knew that she was also correct on all of her other points, and so he couldn’t refute her plan completely. In the end, Erza always won out against him anyways. Partially because
he always let her, partially because she was so tenacious. He couldn’t love her as much as he did, if she wasn’t.

“Jellal?” Came Erza’s impatient voice once more, through the earpiece. She was still standing there in wait for whatever it was, he had to say to her, before commencing the first part of their-her plan.

“Yes…” He replied to let her know, he had heard her. “You look lovely by the way. That was all I wanted to say.” He finished, still smiling.

*I’m such a sucker…* He thought with another shake of his head. His hand was going over his forehead in amusement with himself.

Erza was smirking from her position in front of the casino entrance. She took a moment to look very proud of herself, before answering.

“Why thank you. Perhaps I’ll give you a close up later.” She chimed and Jellal just laughed slightly in response. “Okay, now, let’s get this show on the road.” She announced quietly, before finally walking forwards, towards the door.

Jellal could see her figure, a dark silhouette now, as she neared the lights, getting smaller and smaller, as she got further and further away from him.

*Here it comes…* He thought, as he saw her hesitate just before walking through the open automatic doors. He could see her dark figure turning, and he knew she was looking his way, just like she always did. He closed his eyes and his head angled down.

*Here I am, letting her walk right into danger, once again…* He thought as Erza finally turned away and stepped inside, his eyes opened. *And I can’t do a damn thing… Yes… Nothing has changed… Not one bit…* He thought hopelessly.

There was a child running down the white halls of Magnolia Medical, as fast as her tiny feet could carry her. She wasn’t overly young, about twelve years of age to be more specific. Her body was petite and her skin pale. Her long midnight blue hair was flowing out behind her, like thick foxtails as she continued to run, the strands scattering out in all directions.

She was wearing an adorable green and yellow, textile patterned dress, that reached up and around her neck, allowing her shoulders and upper back to be bare. Her face reflected the innocence of her age, with a small button-like nose and large brown eyes normally full of hope, but right now they were showing signs of worry instead.

Just behind the young girl, was a small cat with a shiny white coat. She was a short haired cat, well-groomed with a baby face and large knowing eyes, of a brown hue. She was quick to keep in pace with the girl, as they ran. Her tiny body was practically leaping each step, as they made their way down the hall fast.

If people didn’t know any better, they would almost think the girl was running away from the cat, when the cat was actually just following the girl around. Fortunately for the pair, just about everyone in the hospital knew who they were and let them move about, as they pleased. The girl was named Wendy Marvell and the feline following her was her cat, Carla.
Now normally cats weren’t even allowed to be in hospitals, but an exception had been made for Carla, because Wendy was special. She was the only granddaughter of the chief of medicine and as a plus, Carla was as well behaved as cats come. She would basically just follow Wendy around everywhere, always keeping a watchful eye out, most unlike a cat and more like an actual guard dog.

The pair continued on their path, down the tiled halls of the hospital, passing by rooms and patients. Doctors and nurses, rounding a corner, only to end up in a more narrowed passageway of the hospital. Where they were quickly coming upon a uniformed man, pushing a cart full of bedsheets. Wendy pivoted to the right to avoid him, but the heel of her flat shoe caused her to slip instead, which then resulted in her landing flat down on her face, with arms out and over her head.

“Whoa Wendy! Are you okay!?” The man pushing the cart had stopped what he was doing, to lend her a hand. Carla had also stopped running and had hopped right in-between Wendy’s outstretched arms, only to land near the girl’s face.

“Yea…” Wendy murmured into the beige floor, more embarrassed than anything else. This was a common occurrence for her, as she was normally pretty clumsy. “I’m fine…” She spoke, her head finally lifting, as Carla licked the top of her forehead with love. The man scratched his cheek as Wendy quickly got to her feet, not allowing him a chance to help her.

“Maybe you should be more careful, kid… Slow down…” He suggested, but it was of no use, because the girl was already taking off down the hall once again. The cat quickly darting away, right behind her.

“Sorry can’t, no time!” She shouted back. “This is an emergency!” The man just stood there and watched her go with a shake of his head, before turning back to his work.

Porlyusica Grandeeney was an old woman who had dedicated many years, not only to the medical profession, but specifically to the town of Magnolia. She had worked her way up the ladder from lowly intern, to chief of medicine at Magnolia Medical, after many years of hard work and now… Now she was tired.

Tired of dealing with people. Managing a hospital was no picnic. It had made her cranky in her old age, but deep down in her heart of hearts, she still cared. She cared about people’s health and well-being, otherwise she would have never tackled the field to begin with.

Currently she was standing before the nurse’s station, with an open binder in her hands. Reading over a patient’s case file, as the doctor of said patient, stood right beside her, nervously waiting to either be chewed out, or told what to do next.

She was a tall woman, far taller than the young male doctor, standing right beside her. She was slender, but her posture was superb, despite her old age. What with her excellent health and all. She knew how to take care of herself. She should, considering her line of work.

She also happened to be dressed very professionally, per usual. She wasn’t one to ever be sloppy, as that was just lazy and she was most definitely not lazy. Right now, she was wearing a fancy
burgundy dress blouse, that she had tucked into her nice charcoal gray work pants. Then to top off the ensemble, she had on a shiny black belt and her long white doctor coat. As for her graying pink hair, she always kept it in a neat little, tight bun, that sat at the very top of her head. She also had long swooping bangs, that parted to either side of her head, perfectly framing her wrinkled face.

Her red eyes betrayed wisdom, while her forehead was deeply wrinkled like she had been glaring at people her whole entire life and it was now just stuck on angry face mode, at all times. The same could be said for her mouth, again the age lines seemed to imply that she was always frowning, and she basically was. This woman rarely ever looked happy and her bedside manner; after years of dealing with patients and doctors, was basically nonexistent. Which was fine, seeing as she rarely treated patients herself, these days.

Yes, she had most definitely become grouchy over the years. What with all of the responsibility she had been carrying over her shoulders, these past ten years. And in dealing with all of the people who didn’t know any better, or who knew too much and took their health for granted anyways.

Most were very intimidated by her. Including the doctor who was still waiting for her reply. He was basically sweating bullets, as he stood there and watched her with wide glossy eyes. That was until a familiar voice rung out from the hall, just in front of them.

“Grandeeney…!” Came Wendy’s loud voice, as she trotted up, just before the old woman and young doctor. She came to a sliding stop, panting heavily. Carla was sitting just beside her, seemingly fine. Porlyusica was watching her, her expression stoic and unmoving as usual. Nothing seemed to rattle this woman, ever… but Wendy was one of the few people who could actually make Porlyusica’s frown crack to a smile, as she was her grandchild.

The daughter of her only daughter and she loved her very much. After all, Wendy was a very well-behaved child, who was always wanting to help others. The young girl would often spend her days there, at the hospital after school, because she too wanted to become a doctor someday. She also loved spending time with her grandmother and helping her out.

Wendy had also nicknamed her Grandmother, Grandeeney, because she had always thought it was cute, how close her grandmother’s last name had sounded to grandma. She had been calling her that for years. Since she was a young child, despite protests from Porlyusica in return, who had secretly found it endearing, but would never admit it. She would instead continue to complain to the young girl about it, true to her grouchy ways.

“Breathe…” Porlyusica demanded sternly, of her clearly panicking grandchild. Wendy did as she was told. Taking a moment to really catch her breath, as her mouth fell open, like a fish’s out of water, so she could fully suck in the air. “How many times have I told you not to call me that…?” Porlyusica scolded in question.

Wendy just glanced up at her grandmother, with a tiny smile and apologetic eyes, as she nodded and still tried to catch her breath. Porlyusica forced the binder she had been holding, firmly into the hands, of the scrubbed adorned man beside her.

“Carry on.” She commanded, without looking at him. A drop of sweat dripped down the side of his face, as he nodded at her and immediately turned away, with the binder in his hands, without another word. Porlyusica looked back down at her grandchild, who appeared to be breathing better now.
“Now… What is it child?” She asked.

“Ineedyoutocometherightnow!” Wendy gasped out so fast, that there was hardly a pause between each word. Which was okay, because Porlyusica seemed to understand her just fine.

“Where are we going?” The old woman asked next. Her voice was calm and slow, the complete opposite of Wendy’s. Wendy was quickly turning away and gesturing towards the hall she had just come from, her feet already beginning to trot away. Carla was bounding right across from her, on the other side of the hall.

“This way grandma! Please, someone needs your help!” Porlyusica stood there, watching her for a moment. Now normally, she would never be told what to do in any such situation, but she would do anything for Wendy. And so, she finally began to follow her granddaughter down the hall, without a word. Her pace was steady, but not really all that fast.

The room they were waiting in was all dark with the exception of a sliver of light, that was filtering in through the crack at the bottom of the door. Gajeel could just make out the outline of Levy’s form, standing beside him, as his eyes continued to adjust. He could also feel the warmth of her hand, as it was settled gently over his forearm. He was sitting on the side of a bed, hunched over in extreme pain.

They were in a hospital room, with the lights off and the door closed, in an effort to not to be found. They had managed to sneak their way in through one of the dock entrances, with the help of a young girl named Wendy, whom Levy seemed familiar with. Wendy had ushered them into the building quickly, before stashing them away in this particular room. Then she had run off again, to come bring them some proper help and now they were just waiting. Waiting around in darkness and silence for a near, painful twenty minutes and Gajeel wasn’t sure how much more of it he could take.

The walk over had been horrible; he had been in so much pain, that he had hardly spoken to Levy the whole time, which was unlike him. He could sense that she was incredibly worried for him, but he had been too exhausted to comfort her during the journey over.

He had been too busy sweating up a storm instead, while still managing to somehow be cold and it all just made him feel so weak. Like he could lose consciousness at any second. The lack of sleep, food and blood was costing him greatly, on top of all of his other problems. In fact, Gejeel could feel his eyes closing and his head lowering every few minutes. That was until Levy’s warm grip over him would tighten, thus bringing him back from the brink, each time he started to drift off.

The distinct scent of stale hospital smell was invading his nose and bringing back unpleasant memories, that were constantly fading into strange little mini dreams, each time he’d start to fall asleep. It had been a long time, since he had actually been inside a hospital. Not since he was a kid, but it was a time he’d still rather forget, as it too, like this experience, had been a very painful one.

He could still picture it now, even after all of these years. Waking up to an overly bright room, with Jose standing at his bedside. His right arm covered in bandages, but still hurting like hell… And then the first thing he had said, was a demand. He had wanted to know the whereabouts of his asshole of a father.

“One…” Came the sound of Levy’s voice, very close to his ear. It was breaking through the
recollection he had just been reliving, like a bright light shattering it into pieces of color, that scattered out in all directions around him. Her refreshing scent was overpowering that of the hospital’s. His eyelids were lifting and there was the faint outline of her head right in front of his. Her hand had already positioned itself, over the one side of his face and he hadn’t even noticed her touch him, until that very moment.

“You need to stay with me…” She spoke gently. He had been far too close to losing consciousness that time and she had literally brought him back to life again.

“Sorry…” He muttered.

“Don’t be sorry… Just stay awake.” She whispered affectionately and he could hear the worried tone in her voice, as her hand dropped away from his face.

“Yea…” He took a breath, as she moved back, giving him back his space. “I’m jus so tired… How much longer, do ya think..?” He asked groggily.

“I don’t know… I’m becoming worried now, that something may have went wrong.” Levy replied. Gajeel could just make out the shape of her small frame, stepping back and forth in the dark. She seemed to be pacing around out of nervousness. She paused, her arms folding. “After all… Wendy is just a little girl…. Maybe it was unfair of me to ask this of her, but I didn’t know who else to go to…”

“She’ll come through…” Came Gajeel’s response. He could tell that she was looking at him, even though he couldn’t see her. He could just imagine the skeptical expression over her face and he couldn’t help, but smirk just ever so slightly. Amused by the idea of it, but let down by the fact, that he couldn’t actually see it. “Little girls always seem to come through… I mean hell, I’m always gettin’ help from one these days, it seems…” He finished with a small groan, but he was still smiling.

“Oh shut up…” Levy muttered in reply, but he could hear the slight amusement in her voice.

“There it is…” He replied, clearly pleased by her response, but his voice still sounded so weak.

“I think you might be delirious.” Levy added dryly.

“I think ya might be right shrimp, but that wouldn’t make me any different than normal, now would it…?” He asked and he could hear Levy laugh softly. And right then he was wishing the lights were on, so he could see her tiny smile and warm gold eyes.

“No… Not really…” She answered softly, her hand had then landed back over his forearm gently and for that one minute they both felt reassured.

The peace however, did not last, because once that minute was over, the door to their room was finally opening, to reveal two figures against the bright light of the hospital hallway. The one in front was short with long hair, clearly the form of the young girl named Wendy. While the other one was much taller and the shape, much stranger.

Gajeel couldn’t really tell what was going on with the person’s head, as he squinted against the brightness, of the now intrusive lights. In fact, both him and Levy, had to bring a hand up, to shield their eyes, after spending so much time in the dark. Wendy took a few steps forwards into the room, with Carla at her feet, while the taller figure stayed in her spot, in the open doorway.

“Levy McGarden!” Came a loud voice, age worn and raspy, clearly that of a woman’s though. The figure finally took a few steps inside. Gajeel could now make out her profile a bit better, once she got
a little closer. It was her hair that had confused him. The way it was tied up on her head, it had
looked kind of strange as just a shadow. The old woman was scowling, as she looked to Levy with
narrowed eyes and she seemed to completely ignore Gajeel’s existence altogether.

“Why is it, you have summoned me?” She demanded, her tone sounding deeply irritated. It was then
that the strange woman’s glare finally shifted towards Gajeel. Her eyes scaling over him without
concern for the raised brow expression he was feeding her back, in return. “What sort of trouble have
you gotten yourself into?” She questioned, somewhat hostilley, as she kept her eye on Gajeel
purposefully. As if she could tell just by looking, that this was somehow all of *his* fault, and she
wanted him to know that she had figured it out.

“Porlyusica.” Levy addressed formally, her head bowing in apology. “I’m sorry…” The old woman
turned her head back towards Levy at this, her face didn’t change, but her tone eased.

“You are pale child…” She informed as Levy looked back up to her, with large shining eyes. “And
you are injured…” Porlyusica added, as her eyes took notice of the large bandage across Levy’s
head.

“I promise you… I’m fine…” Levy replied softly, “But… My friend…” The old woman could see
the fear and worry etched all over the girl’s face, as she glanced towards the large man sitting on the
bed.

“Well go on… Out with it.” The old woman encouraged, though her voice left a lot to be desired, as
it was anything, but comforting.

“Y-Yes…” Levy stuttered, trying to keep her cool, but struggling. “I’m-I’m sorry, but I…” Levy
paused, looking to Gajeel once more. He was growing tired again. His eyes were struggling to stay
open. “We, need your help…” She uttered, glancing back up to the old woman, her voice was
becoming desperate.

Porlyusica’s eye landed back over Gajeel at this. She could see his growing exhaustion, as he
struggled to stay awake. She noticed his strange posture, his heavy breathing and the blood in his
clothing. She could see he was in serious need of medical attention. He needed it, as soon as
possible.

“Why do you come to me, like this?” Porlyusica demanded, her head snapping back to Levy. Levy
was looking down in shame and she couldn’t bring herself to match eyes with the old woman.

“Because… We have no other options…” She explained, her voice quiet. “Gajeel cannot be
administrated into the hospital’s system.” She then finally glanced up to meet the old woman’s, stoic
stare. “I am sorry to ask this of you, but please…” She was beginning to beg, her eyes welling up
with tears, that did not shed. “He has been stabbed.” She confirmed with power behind her voice.

Days ago… And I… I was the *one* who stitched him up… At home… But the stiches didn’t hold!”
She exclaimed, that fact clearly upsetting her, but she held it together for the moment. “So, it is my
fault!” She admitted strongly, with a hand going to her chest. “I am sorry Porlyusica, but I let you
down…” She was becoming frazzled and her words were coming out fast. “I didn’t do a satisfactory
job in stitching him up, like you taught me and now-”

“Levy…” Came Gajeel’s rough, but tired voice, suddenly interrupting the nearly hysterical girl
before the doctor. “Stop it…” He growled through a body heaving huff. His eyes were half lidded
and lazy as they glanced over to the old woman’s face. Levy had quieted, but she was already crying
again, silently. “This isn’t her fault… This is on me…” He told the old woman firmly, though his
voice was raspy, like he was hardly with it.
The old woman was staring at Gajeel as he stared back, unyielding. His body heaving with fatigue. There was silence as the two of them stared at one another and Levy and Wendy just watched, both with tears gathering in their eyes.

“Fine…” Porlyusica finally answered begrudgingly, her eyes closing with acceptance.

“You’ll do it?!” Levy exclaimed bewildered. The old woman’s eyes opened and she looked back to the small girl.

“You young people… You take your youth for granted, treating your bodies like they are rag dolls… Never taking your health into consideration.” She shook her head with annoyance, before looking back over to Levy. “I will do this for you, child… Because I can see that you won’t rest easy, until I do… I knew your family well… And I can’t knowingly send my dear departed friend’s granddaughter away, when she is in such need of my help.” She stated, though she sounded more annoyed than anything, but Levy could care less. All she knew was that, this woman was willing to help Gajeel and that was all that mattered to her. She was smiling between tears; her heart was pounding so hard, that she felt like it might make her fall over.

“Thank you! Thank you!” She was exclaiming.

“Don’t thank me yet…” Porlyusica was interrupting. “I need to know what else is wrong with him, before I can know how much I’ll be able to do.” Levy was stepping forwards at this, her body full of sudden adrenaline now.

“It’s his shoulder as well…” She informed. “He took a very bad fall; we think he may have dislocated it.” Levy explained. Porlyusica looked to Gajeel, who was cringing in pain, almost if the mere mention of it, made him hurt all the more.

“I see…” The old woman responded calmly. Her eyes still scaling over the clearly in agony man, once more without moving her body a single inch, just yet. “You…” She hissed. Her head was nodding towards Gajeel, as she earned his attention. “Remove the jacket. I need to see what I am dealing with!” She snapped, her voice was cold.

Gajeel’s eyes widened a bit at this. He was a bit surprised by the sudden sass in her voice, when she addressed him, but he slowly started to move and do as ordered anyways, despite running into difficulties.

“Oh, Gajeel wait…” Levy spoke. She was coming towards him, as she just couldn’t sit there and watch him struggle. Her small hands were grabbing the ends of his jacket and pushing it off of his shoulders carefully, as Gajeel tried to maneuver in such a way, to help her get it off of him. Porlyusica was watching them, she still hadn’t moved from her spot and her eyes narrowed in on Levy again.

“Levy.” She addressed. Levy turned her head to look at the old woman, but she continued to help Gajeel take his arm out of the sleeve of his leather coat.

“I want you and Wendy to wait outside, while I do everything.” The old woman demanded. “There is a waiting room around the corner.”

“But I can help you.” Levy replied, her eyes still on the old woman, but then she had to turn away, to help Gajeel get his bad arm out of the other coat sleeve.

“I am aware… but please just do as I ask. I won’t be needing any help.” She explained sternly. Levy turned to look back at the old woman sharply, before turning back towards Gajeel.
They had finally managed to push the leather jacket, all of the way down the length of his bad arm and she was now getting her very first look, at the strange bump that was Gajeel’s bone. Proruding awkwardly, from underneath the cotton sleeve of his tight T-shirt and it looked god awful. So awful that, just the very sight of it, very nearly made Levy want to pass out.

Her complexion was paling considerably, as she turned to look at Gajeel’s face in clear alarm. He glanced back, his eyes tired and unimpressed, as if he had been well aware of what it would look like, this whole entire time.

“Gajeel…” She uttered with a complete loss of breath. She was looking from his face, to his shoulder again and again, in complete shock.

“Don’t worry Levy…” He muttered weakly, earning her eyes back over his face. Her mouth was open, like she had more to say, but there were no words. “Just leave me with the ol’ lady… I’ll be fine…”

“But Gajeel I…” She was looking away from him, to Porlyusica with fear in her eyes. Almost as if she thought maybe, she could change the old woman’s mind.

“Shhhh.” Gajeel hushed her gently. “Look at me.” He then ordered, earning her eyes back over his, once more. “You promised she could help, right?” He asked and Levy just nodded in response.

“Yes, but-”

“Well I trust you…” Gajeel replied, before she could say another word. “And its bout time you start trustin’ you, okay?” Gajeel told her. Levy was staring at him, at a complete loss for words again, and then she finally just nodded in agreement. She felt completely sick to her stomach, but she had nothing to add. “Good girl…” He huffed, a very small smirk was creeping its way over his lips. “Take her outta here, Wendy…” Gajeel requested, with a slight groan.

The young girl, who had been standing quietly on the sidelines this whole time, finally stepped forwards once summoned. She approached Levy carefully, taking hold of the older girl’s hand, gently.

“Come on Levy…” She was saying, as she pulled Levy lightly behind her, by the hand. “Let’s let Grandeeny get started, okay…” She suggested affectionately. “She’ll do a good job… I promise…” The young girl was assuring Levy, as she pulled her out of the room with Porlyusica and Gajeel’s eyes on them. Once they were gone, Carla was quickly bounding out the door, after them and then Gajeel was alone.

Alone with the old woman, who he could tell, despised him.

She was glaring at him, still in her same standing position. Her red eyes were narrowing in on him with spite. He could see them moving over his dislocated shoulder, paying special attention to something in particular. He figured it was the edges of his Phantom tattoo, hanging out from the bottom of his T-shirt sleeve, that she was looking at.

There was another few seconds of silence, before she finally decided to speak. Looking him directly in the eye, with that same disgusted look.

“I haven’t the foggiest idea why that girl, feels the need help someone like you, but you better stay away from her after this night is over.” She snapped, before turning away to slam the door shut and then switch on the strange hanging lamp above Gajeel’s head. Gajeel blinked several times, trying to adjust to the bright light, that was now shining down, right over him. “Now take off your shirt.”
Porlyusica dismissed, without missing a beat, as she stepped away to one side of the room, where there was a counter. Gajeel could hear her rummaging, but he had no idea what she was doing.

He was unfazed by the woman’s demands to stay away from Levy, in fact, he had fully expected it from the moment he had matched eyes with the old bird. He had been able to tell right in that first moment, that she didn’t trust him. And he could also sense her protectiveness over Levy and so, he couldn’t blame her for jumping down his throat, the minute they were alone. She was completely right after all, he needed to stay away from Levy, just as he had originally intended. Gajeel’s head was looking down and to the side, as his left hand reached for the bottom rim of his T-shirt.

“I din’t want her help ya know… Not tonight, not the night before… Not any night, but…” He hesitated with the shirt halfway up his torso, his fingers were still trying to pull the shirt up and over his head. “She wouldn’t leave…” He uttered, before continuing to get the shirt off. It took a few seconds of struggling, but he finally managed to get it up, and over his head successfully, but there was still the matter of getting it down and off his injured arm. He began to cringe, as he slowly pushed the molded-up piece of fabric down his injured shoulder, with the opposite hand.

“Of course not, you fool.” He heard the old woman scold him. He glanced up, just as the fabric fell down the length of his stationary arm, only to land in a bundle at the end of his wrist. The old woman was reaching into one of the cabinets up above the counter, but he couldn’t see what she was getting. Then he saw her holding what appeared to be a bottle and a syringe. She was sticking the syringe through the bottle. He was watching her carefully as the muscles in his shoulder continued to spasm for relief. “My granddaughter is a very intelligent, young girl…” The old woman continued, changing the subject as he watched the syringe fill with whatever liquid was in the bottle. “She brought you to the right room.” She added, after setting the bottle back down on the counter and then turning to look at him. “You need to take off your pants too.” She told him firmly, her eye unyielding.

Gajeel could not help the frown, that formed over his face. It was definitely not hot, hearing those same words from this old bat, as it had been hearing them from Levy.

“Don’t look at me like that, you guttersnipe! I am a doctor!” The old woman spat.

Gajeel just groaned, before finally moving the hand from his good arm, to undo the button of his jeans. It was most definitely a struggle with only one hand, but he finally managed to get his jeans down, far enough. The old woman’s eyes were practically blazing with irritation, once the blood-soaked jeans lifted off of the spot where his torn stitches were.

“I will be injecting you with a dose lidocaine… To numb you around the area where I will be removing the old sutures and putting in the new ones.” She explained sternly.

She stepped closer, as Gajeel swallowed back some in pain. He again, felt very tired, the injuries were weakening him greatly, to a point where he hardly cared anymore.

Porlyusica was holding the syringe up by her face, as she eyed him carefully and he finally caught her stare and he couldn’t look away. Something was suddenly making him feel some extreme discomfort. Almost as if he thought the old woman might be poisoning him, and though he trusted Levy’s judgement… He still needed answers.

“Why…?” He asked weakly. “Why did you call me a fool…?” He questioned. The old woman’s eyes narrowed on his. She could sense his hesitation.

“What is your name boy…?” She hissed condescendingly. “And don’t lie… I want the truth…” She demanded fiercely.
“Gajeel… Gajeel Redfox.” He watched her face without blinking. He could swear, he saw fascination twinkle in her red eyes. Almost as if she knew things about him, that he didn’t.

“Redfox you say…? Well…” She glanced away quickly with a roll of her eyes, before matching his stare once again. “I’ll have you know Mr. Redfox, I’m well aware of who you are affiliated with.” She informed him, with a slight movement towards the tattoo on his dislocated shoulder. “You have made some choices in your life… Some bad ones… And that girl… Levy McGarden… She is of interest to me, you see… I knew her family well, when they were all still with us. Bless her heart, she also interned here with me over the summer…” Gajeel’s eyes were perking up at this news, and the woman continued, with hardly a pause. “She is going to Makarov’s school… And she wants to be a doctor, like her parents. My point is… She is bright Mr. Redfox and far too kind, as you have clearly seen… And so, you can understand right? That she is a good person, with good blood and she shouldn’t be mixing with the likes of yours?” The woman questioned. “You understand that… Don’t you?” The old woman hissed, her eyes narrowing further, in an effort to hurt him purposefully with her words. “That even though, she may care about your well-being… That you need to be the one to push her away…” The woman questioned, but it was more like she was instructing him on what to do.

“Now I get it…” Gajeel breathed, his head looking down. This old lady seemed to have it in her head, that Levy cared about him, but he wasn’t sure he believed that. It didn’t matter, anyways. “Don’t worry…” He told her. “She won’t be seein’ me again, after this…” He stated.

“Good.” The old woman replied. “Now…” She addressed. “Normally we sedate a patient when dealing with a dislocation, but I won’t be doing that, Mr. Redfox… And so now you understand why, I couldn’t have her in here with us, being hysterical…” She explained. “I don’t wish to waste anymore supplies on you, then I already am, including drugs. It seems unethical to use them like this and especially on a criminal, so be warned… This will be extremely painful…” She informed him plainly. Gajeel just looked to her, his brow lowering with annoyance, above all else.

“That’s fine.”

Levy was waiting… With her one shoulder resting up against the hospital wall, near the room, that Porlyusica had just kicked her and Wendy out of. She was staring at the door as she tried her best to listen through the wall, but she could hear nothing. She stood there, completely unable to bring herself to walk away, as she was just too anxious to let it go. Her brow was furrowing with concern and concentration.

She had removed her coat and bag, as suggested by Wendy, as a way to ease her stress levels, once they had reached the small waiting area Porlyusica had mentioned. It was just down the hall and around the corner. She had also left Wendy there, with her stuff, by feeding her a lie about going to use the restroom. When really, she had just wondered back to Gajeel’s room, against Porlyusica’s wishes and Wendy’s advice.

Now dawned in her long sleeved, gray and black striped shirt and a pair of skinny jeans. She waited for any sort of noise that might breach the hospital walls, from inside that room. Her arms were folded with discomfort and her boots were still soaked from the snow. Her head was angled down with apprehension and her ear was near the wall, as she tried to listen carefully.

She hated being shut out and she was a complete bundle of nerves at the moment, because of it. How was she supposed to remain calm, while sitting idly by, on the sidelines? No… She wanted to know what was going on in that room. She wanted to be there for Gajeel… Even if he didn’t agree with
her being there.

“Levy?” Came the voice of Wendy. Levy turned around to see the young girl standing only a few feet away, with Carla just behind her. “What are you doing?” Wendy asked. Levy lifted her body up and off of the wall, upon being caught. Her arms were going down at her sides, as her expression eased. She turned to look back at the door just behind her, before finally turning back around to face the puzzled child with acceptance.

“Okay…” She replied taking a few steps closer. “You caught me Wendy…” Levy glanced down, as Wendy trotted towards her. “I just wanted to see if I could hear anything… To, ya know… Make sure Gajeel was doing alright…” She explained. Her fingers fiddling together, as Wendy stepped up just before her. Her gold eyes finally went back up, to meet the younger girl’s face. Levy was only about a foot or two taller than Wendy, in truth. Wendy watched Levy and then her gaze shifted towards the door, before looking back up to Levy’s face again.

“You’re really worried about him, huh?” Wendy asked and Levy just nodded, with a weak smile over her face. She stole another quick glance at the door, from over her shoulder.

“Yea… It’s hard seeing him this way… I never thought he could scare me like this…” She replied, turning back around, to fully face the smaller girl.

“So, is he your boyfriend then?” Wendy suddenly asked and this made Levy’s mouth fall open.

“Oh-uh n-no. No, he isn’t.” Levy answered, a little taken aback by the question. Wendy’s head tilted at her response.

“Oh really?” She replied curiously. “It seems like he really cares about you though… And you seem to care about him a lot too.” She pointed out simply. Levy’s eyes were darting up to the ceiling.

“Uh- yes…” Levy replied uneasily, her eyes coming back down to meet Wendy’s.

“Okay well… Do you love him then?” She suddenly asked. Levy looked even more startled by this question, as her face immediately turned bright red.

“Oh… Uh!” She was stuttering with a strange look over her face. “I don’t know about that!” She replied, but Wendy again seemed confused.

“Really…? Are you sure? Your face is really red…” Wendy again pointed out.

“Well I—” But unfortunately Levy didn’t really get to finish that next thought, because a startling and very loud bellowing scream, suddenly rung out from the room they were standing right next to. Both girls froze, while their eyes grew into wide saucers.

“Gajeel!” Levy yelled, as it dawned on her what she was hearing. He was yelling out in pain. She began to turn, her mind and body in complete an utter panic. She needed to get inside of that room! She needed to get to him, but something was stopping her! Something had grabbed hold of her wrist.

“Wendy!” Levy turned to see Wendy holding onto her arm, with all of her strength.

“No Levy! STOP!” The girl was crying out; her eyes were closed tightly. Tears were forming by her eyelashes. “You can’t!” She cried. “Grandeeeny told us to stay out here…!”

“No Wendy he-!” Levy could see Wendy was shaking, as her eyes looked over the clearly distressed child, who was still trying to hold her back. She could feel her own tears welling up with desperation. She felt the guilt seeping into her, for putting Wendy in such a position, for once again, being the one to fall apart.
Well I trust you... She could hear Gajeel’s voice suddenly popping into her head once again. And its bout time you start trustin’ you, okay…?

Came the rest of what he had said to her and then Levy knew right then, that he was indeed right, as much as she hated to admit it, whenever Gajeel was right. And so, she made a choice right in that moment, to follow that advise and trust her own judgment for once. Porlyusica would be the one to help Gajeel and for now, it was her job, to be the adult in this situation… Not Wendy’s. Whom she was only further upsetting, with her own selfish reactions.

“Okay…” She breathed out, her tense body finally easing. “I understand…” She began to turn her head. “Wendy…” She addressed.

Wendy’s eyes were opening at the sound of her name and then she finally let go of Levy’s arm, once she saw that the older girl was no longer trying to pull away, towards the door. They both stood there dejectedly for a moment, before again, hearing another yell that made them both jump and cringe. Then silence reigned over once again and it was this time, that Levy looked down to the younger girl’s face.

“Let’s get back to the waiting area…” She advised in an effort, to be the adult, as she should be. Wendy glanced back up to Levy, with tears pooling in her eyes. The child was clearly just as scared and worried as Levy herself, if not more so, but she nodded without a word anyways. Levy smiled at the younger girl, as warmly as she could muster in such a situation. She then stepped forwards, putting an arm around Wendy’s shoulders and then the two of them both began to walk away from the room together, with Carla right beside their feet.

“Will he really be okay?” Wendy asked, with a little sniffle.

“He will…” Levy replied. “After all…” Wendy was glancing up at Levy who was giving her a comforting smile in return. “Nobody is a better doctor, than your grandma… Right?”

“Right…”

“Maybe he isn’t coming after all…” Came the voice in her head, but it wasn’t her own voice she was hearing. It was the voice of Jellal, coming through the tiny speaker tucked securely, into her one ear. Erza glanced around the room before her, her eye paying special attention to a very drunk man seated on one of the many red lounge couches. Surrounded by three women that wouldn’t give him the time of day normally, but were basically being paid to be there.

She was in the lobby of the Twilight Ogre Casino, a large circular room, with steps going up to a balcony, on either side. The upper floor contained a bar, and lots of areas to sit and eat. Below the balcony, in the middle, was the main casino room’s doorway. The whole space was set aglow by a grand chandelier right above their heads.

It was actually a very nice-looking place, despite the scummy person who owned it and Erza could really see that now, that the crowds were all gone, but that also meant she had been there for far too long. Just following Banaboster around the place, like a damn lap dog, just to make sure nobody would suddenly jump him, as he got very drunk and very horny. Yep… Erza was most definitely over the job, at this point in the night. Hell, she couldn’t even drink herself, considering the fact, that she was currently working.

Right now, she was actually holding a martini glass that was nearly full, as a waiter came walking
towards her. She then quickly set the drink down on his tray as he passed by, before then wiping her now free gloved hands.

“Yea…” She muttered quietly, keeping her eyes peeled for anyone who might see her talking to herself. Luckily, everyone who was left at the party was too blasted at this point, to really be paying her any mind. “I was thinking the same thing…” She added quietly.

“Good.” She heard Jellal reply.

“I’m glad you agree…” Jellal was saying from his position outside of the casino. He was located near a discreet side entrance of the building. He had been circling and casing the building for quite some time, as Erza did surveillance from the inside. Both of them had been keeping a watchful eye, for any sign of Aria, or any other suspicious characters who might try and go after Banaboster that night.

It had been an especially hard job for Jellal, because he had, had to stay completely out of sight from all of the casino’s security officers and its cameras, unlike Erza, who could hide in plain sight. Luckily for Jellal, he already excelled at this kind of stuff, because he had once been a thief and he was used to breaking into high security buildings. Hell, he had even served a prison sentence for it and so he knew how to stay out of sight, for the most part.

“Maybe it’s time we get you out of there then.” Jellal suggested to Erza from his tiny mic.

“Yes.” He heard her reply and it made him smile and breathe out, in a sigh of relief. He too, was ready for this to be over, or more like he was ready for Erza to be out of there and safe.

“It has gotten so late and the party is basically dead, anyways.” Erza replied, noticing how empty the grand lobby of the casino was looking now. Meanwhile, Banaboster was attempting to get to his feet from the couch, but was doing a poor job, due to being so drunk. Erza was watching him fall over once or twice, before finally managing to stand on his wobbly and stumpy fat legs.

“I’ll be right back sweetheart, I’m gonna go take a leak!” The fat man was telling one of the women on the couch, with no attention to the loudness of his voice, or the topic of his conversation. Erza was rolling her eyes with disgust at the scene, before she finally glanced away again.

“I feel like, if they were going to strike, they would have done it when it was crowded, so they could sneak in and out, without being seen… You know, take advantage of the chaos kind of a deal.”

“Yea…” She heard Jellal reply. “I think you’re right. That would have been the ideal time for Aria to grab Banaboster from somewhere in a corner.” Erza nodded, her eyes still on the form, of the fat casino owner as he headed towards the bathrooms. She started to step in that direction as a precaution.

“Maybe I should just do one more lap around the inside… Just to be sure that nobody is in here, before I walk out.” She suggested.

Jellal was pinching the bridge of his nose at this suggestion. Erza was so thorough, which was great and all, but right now, he just wanted her out of there.
“Do whatever you need to do then…” He dismissed with a sigh. “Guess I’ll do the same…” He added, finally stepping away from his cover spot.

“Fifteen minutes.” He heard her say, as he began his long walk around the building for the umpteenth time that night, through the snow.

Ten minutes went by without so much as a peep; Jellal continued to make his rounds around the casino quickly and quietly. Again, he was careful to not be seen or get caught on camera. He kept moving, until something finally did catch his attention. A noise, a loud one. Like a person stumbling over something.

Jellal was just behind the building at this point near the corner. He decided to take cover behind a row of stacked pallets by the dock entrance, as he kept a lookout for wherever the sound had come from.

“I have a problem.” Came Erza’s voice, coincidently from over his earpiece, while he hid.

“Oh yea… Well I might too.” Jellal whispered, with his back against the pallets, facing away from the building.

“I can’t find Banaboster…” Erza replied, Jellal’s eyes widened at this news.

“What happened?” He asked with confusion.

Erza was standing in the men’s room with her gun out and pointed at a man who had been peeing, but had soon stopped, once he saw her and her gun in the mirror. He was now just standing there, with his pants down and his hands up in the air, as Erza’s gun was pointed at the back of his head.

“I’m not sure… He was taking too long.” She replied into her mic, gun still up. “So, I went into the bathroom and now he isn’t here. Isn’t that right?” She questioned the man in front of her, her gun closing in on his head a little.

“NO! He isn’t here I swear!” The man cried out in deep fear.

Jellal could hear the man’s desperate cries from over the mic.

“Then where the hell is he?” Jellal questioned, more to himself than to anyone, with disbelief in his tone. His head was falling back against the pallets just behind him.

“Not sure what to do, just yet…” He heard Erza say, but he was distracted by movement out of the corner of his eye. Jellal froze, his head angling forwards a bit and then he saw it. A large person walking in the night, near the building. His eyes widened as he realized who it was.

“Erza!” Jellal exclaimed into his mic. “You need to get outside, now!”

“What…? Why? What is it?” She questioned, her brow pushing together, as she continued to hold her gun up to the man in the bathroom.
“Someone is here and…”

“Yea… Fuck!” Jellal was cursing out of breath, as his head flew back in frustration. “Banaboster is outside! He is out here, Erza!” He had just darted back towards the direction he had come from and seen the familiar shape of the fat stout man, stumbling around near the side alleyway. He was by the corner, where the large dumpsters were. He must have been the person Jellal had heard, make the noise.

Why the man was outside, he had no idea, but he was a sitting duck right now, as somebody else seemed to be around as well… And it was clear to Jellal, that they too, were aware of Banaboster’s location. Based on their movements.

“What?!” Erza was exclaiming as she lowered her gun at last. “Where?!?” she demanded.

“The back exit, right side of the building, near the corner. Quick!” She heard Jellal state.

“Shit!” Erza hissed, as she turned away from the man who had been peeing and headed towards the door. Her arms were down, but she had both hands wrapped around her gun as she ran, heels and all.

Jellal was keeping his eye on the fat man stumbling around, against the outside wall of the casino. He then looked to the right, where the clear shape of Aria’s large bear-like body, was marching forward, against the white glow of snow, like the undertaker.

“Erza…” Jellal was saying. “He’s here… He’s going to kill him…”

“Just wait…” She was gasping into her mic, as she continued to run, but security was soon running up to meet her, with guns cocked and ready.

“DON’T MOVE!” Jellal could hear them shouting from over the mic and he was immediately cursing, as he watched Aria finally pause. Banaboster was now in the large brooding man’s sights.

“Wait!” He could hear Erza yelling. “I’m a detective, a captain actually! You can check my badge!”

“Fuck…Erza…” He hissed. “I can’t wait…” He muttered, ripping the earpiece from his head and throwing it on the ground, before stomping on it. Followed by the mic, as well. He couldn’t risk her getting caught with him, if something went wrong. He then pulled the handkerchief above his mouth and pulled his hat down, further over his head, so that only his eyes were now visible, before swiftly moving into action.

Erza was on her knees before several casino security guards, with guns pointed at her. Her own gun was on the ground in front of her, as one of the guards approached her to check the badge, she had
mentioned. Her eyes went wide as she suddenly heard nothing, but loud static in her ear.

*Jellal*?

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Banaboster had a hand leaned up against the brick wall of the casino. He was standing there, hunched over slightly. He was still trying to recover from just being sick, all over the snow-covered pavement. He wiped at his mouth with the sleeve of his dress coat. His breath was coming out in large puffs from the cold. He had come outside to get some air, because he had been feeling sick and then he had ended up throwing up anyways. He had definitely drunk his fill for the night.

He raised his head; his glossy bloodshot eyes were taking in the surrounding alleyway with confusion. The combination of bright snow, the moon and the navy sky was bewildering him, as it all slurred together in array of strange lights. Then came movement, as something large and black stepped forwards, blocking his view of the moon.

Banaboster’s eyes squinted in the night, as he tried to understand what it was, that he was looking at.

“Who’s there?!” He bellowed out, in confusion. Steadying himself against the wall once more, as he took a stumbling step forward.

The large being did not speak for the moment, it instead just stood there without moving in the slightest. Almost as if, it wasn’t even breathing and for a moment, Banaboster thought maybe, it was just a drunken hallucination. He slowly started to meander closer to it, more out of curiosity than anything else.

Whatever it was, it was super wide and extremely tall as well, almost like a bear or something.

“What’re you!?” Banaboster questioned. His brow lifting as he looked up at it. Then finally, it spoke.

“So sad…” It said in whiny, but quiet voice. Banaboster was now understanding that it was indeed a person. Just a very large one, standing right before him, but he still had no idea what he was in for.

“What’s sad…?” Banaboster questioned completely perplexed, but there was no reply, at least not one in words. Instead all he got in response, was a lack of oxygen, as a piece of clear thick plastic was suddenly stretched tightly across the whole span of his face.

“Jellal…?!” He could hear her voice. It was bringing him back from the depths of extreme shock. There was her face, looking completely bewildered. Her one eye was black and nearly swollen shut, while the other was wide with fear. She was on the floor; her long scarlet hair was down, cascading around her naked shoulders. She was wearing a thin white, spaghetti strapped tank top, that was also smeared with red, and tiny pajamas shorts. Her mouth was open; blood was splattered in little drops across her face. Her lip was bleeding and swollen. Her normally white teeth were stained with red and Jellal…

His hands were shaking profusely.

He slowly glanced down, only to find that he was holding a kitchen knife. The blade was covered in the same sticky red liquid, and he could just feel it… It was all over him as well. Across his face, just like hers. On his hands and arms, even in his hair. There was no escape from it, blood was everywhere.

He dropped the knife, panic ensuing. There on the floor, between him and Erza’s feet, was a body. The body of Mr. Belserion, lying flat on the ground. His thick dark-haired head, turned to the side
and matted, from the growing pool of blood he was lying in. His eyes were wide open and lifeless. Jellal’s jaw was clenching and his knees were quivering. What had happened? What had he done? His bloody hands were going to either side of his head. His mind was screaming for him to remember. He could see it there, in his memory, like a distant nightmare he wished to never relive. Erza being yanked around violently by the hair. Her feet slipping across the kitchen floor as she tried to stop it. He could see it, from the view of a window he had been looking through. Her body being forced up and struck. And then his heart just gave out and there was nothing! Nothing, but this hellish scene to wake up to, and he was losing himself in it. Had he done this? Him? Had he just murdered someone?!

“Jellal!” Came her voice, breaking through the panic. He was looking to her again, her hands were on either side of his face. Several of her fingers were completely broken. He was on the verge of losing his sanity. His dark eyes were clouded with madness and she was the only thing keeping him there. “Don’t do this!!!” She begged. “You saved me!” She was crying hysterically. “You saved my life and now you need to run! You have to run, Jellal! You need to stay alive! You need to live!”

Run… She had told him. Live… She had said.

Hell, she hadn’t just told him, she had begged him too and so he did.

He had turned away from her and took off out the door, without a second’s more of hesitation and then he disappeared. Never to return to his hometown, again.

There is no such thing as freedom in this world, anyways… So, what did it matter to him if he had to live his life on the run after that? What did it matter, if he had to grow up in the criminal element just to get by?

At least he had saved her from that prison and from dirtying her hands… He had sinned for her on that day, oh so long ago, so she wouldn’t have too and although they would never truly be free… He could still always at least try, and save her.

Jellal was holding a large combat knife in his right hand, his eyes glued to the large back of Aria, as he was slowly suffocating Banaboster with a plastic bag. He knew he could not wait any longer and so he didn’t. He dashed forwards, his knife cutting the large man in the back of the calf. Aria stumbled, as Jellal moved past his large frame. Banaboster fell out of the man’s grasp and to the ground, near his feet. He was gasping for air, once the bag was removed from his head, he was coughing violently, in recovery.

Jellal was now standing about fifteen feet away from the large man, who was now struggling to stand, after being cut in the leg.

I just need to stall him… Jellal thought, a smirk was forming over his face, as he stared down the large killer whom was known to work for Jose.

“Plastic bag Aria? Same M-O I see…” Jellal shouted, from across the snow filled alleyway.

“Who are you?” Aria demanded in his normal deep, but sad filled voice.

“The one who’s going to stop you.” Jellal announced as he stood up tall, but Aria just smiled widely.
He didn’t seem impressed and then his large hand was reaching for Banaboster.

“Oh, I see…” Aria was saying as his hand practically engulfed the shoulder of the still struggling casino owner, who was still on the ground coughing. “You want to protect him.” He stated. “But you can’t.”

“No..!” Banaboster was choking, as he tried to get away, but he was already being man-handled by the giant. Jellal was rushing into action once more, but Aria who was ready for his approach, began to pivot away. Luckily Jellal was faster, his knife was jetting forwards, plunging into the man.

Blood spilled, but Aria’s steps didn’t falter this time. Instead he just smiled at Jellal. It was a large toothy grin, before he then just grabbed both of Jellal’s shoulders and slammed him, back first, against the brick wall of the casino. Jellal’s hat fell to the wayside, revealing his face to the large man, who had let Banaboster go.

“I know you, Jellal Fernadez….” Aria spoke. His sunglasses had fallen off during their struggle and so Jellal was surprised to find, two milky white eyes staring him down. This man seemed to be blind! “What a sad story yours is…” Aria continued, with a large square toothed smile. Blood was seeping between his teeth. Jellal’s stab wound, perhaps damaging him more than he had let on.

“And yet, you shed no tears for me…?” Jellal mustered a restrained laugh, between clenched teeth, as Aria was pressing on his whole entire body with all of his weight. The pain of the blow, was coming through Jellal’s voice.

“Not yet…” Aria warned. “It isn’t sad enough, yet… But…” From his green trench coat Aria pulled out a tiny snub-nosed pistol he had been concealing, between his large sausage fingers. “Don’t worry… It will be.” He chided as Jellal’s eyes grew wide. Aria was then, jamming the muzzle of his gun, right up and into Jellal’s side and pulling the trigger before either of them could do or say anything more.

Banaboster, who had just been getting to his feet, jumped at the sound of the gun. He then began to take off in a clumsy run, through the snow filed alleyway. Aria couldn’t help but turn his head and see his target fleeing the scene. He turned back towards Jellal, his eyes already beginning to water, as he took in the wounded man’s face with blind eyes. Jellal’s eyes were open wide for the moment, but he could feel the weakness there, waiting to settle in and drag him slowly to death’s door.

“So sad… But I must leave you now…” Aria cried, the tears already streaming down his cheeks. His large hands were lifting off of Jellal’s limp body and he let the blue haired fugitive just slink to the floor. A large circle of red was now dawned on the building’s wall, from the bleeding wound in Jellal’s back. “I will return, to send you off properly…” Aria choked between sobs, before reaching down to pick up his fallen sunglasses. He put them back over his eyes and then began to march away, in the direction he had seen his original prey go.

Jellal’s face was wet and cold against the snow. Ice water was seeping into his nose and he could feel himself struggling to hold onto consciousness, as he watched the large frame of Aria tromp away from him, through the snow. His lips curled.

“You won’t…” He groaned as he slowly began to push his shaking body up and out of the snow. His body was shaking profusely, but he knew he needed to move. He needed to run… to live… Just like before, because he knew that was what she would want him to do.
He had managed to get to his feet. His blood was staining the snow, where he had been laying. He lazily glanced up to the wall, where the large circle of his blood was still dripping.

*But first…* He smirked. His shaky hand was reaching up towards the blood on the wall. *This one is for you…* His eyes closed. *Natsu…*

It felt like it had taken an eternity for the security force to get their shit together, but really it had only been about ten or fifteen minutes. And then finally, Erza was armed again. This time she had the whole casino security force behind her, as back up, as a group of them headed for the door Jellal had instructed her to go through. She had sent the rest of the team to various other exits around the casino, to cover all of their bases. She herself was now leading the charge out the door Jellal had mentioned. First body to step out, with her gun up and ready. She was then patrolling the area, still with her high heels on, even in the snow.

“Ask if anyone sees anything yet.” She demanded of one of female security guards, who was following just behind her. The woman rose the radio up to her lips.

“Any sign of the suspect?”

“Nada.” Came the reply. Erza was motioning them forwards, before moving ahead herself. She came upon the corner slowly, with her gun still in the ready position. Then she whipped around, arms out, hands wrapped around her gun, but what she found wasn’t a person…

It was just a lot of blood in the form of a picture on the wall. A picture Erza knew all too well. A fairy, with a very long tail. She froze, her eyes shining in fear, as she noted all of the blood on the ground as well.

Several bodies appeared around the corner, right behind Erza with guns ready, but they all stopped, once they saw the captain just standing there, with her gun lowered. One of them was the female officer with the radio. They all just stood there, eyeing the blood with confusion and concern, just as Erza had been, before the radio suddenly went off, alerting them all.

“We got them! The suspect has been apprehended!” Came a proud voice from over the radio. “We also managed to find Banaboster. He appears to be mostly, unharmed, but the suspect seems to need medical attention. It looks like he may have been stabbed.”

Erza turned away from the radio, as everyone else cheered around her. She then glanced back to the image on the wall, with horror.

*Jellal… Are you alive?*

*“Do fairies even have tails…?”*

Levy could hear the kind old voice of her grandmother asking this question. *“Do fairies even exist…?”*

“I don’t know… Do they…?” She was questioning back.
“Nobody knows for sure…” Came her grandmother’s reply in return. She was holding Levy in her warm embrace, as she read these words... Just like she always used to, before tucking her in for bed at night.

Levy could still remember the first feeling of fascination that came over her, from the words of a simple book. She could also remember what it felt like to be safe and secure in her bed, with people who loved her. Her family…

“It is an eternal mystery…” Her grandmother’s voice continued. “An eternal adventure…”

It all felt so real… Like she was really back there, in her childhood home. She could even smell the faint scent of peppermint that her grandmother always seemed to carry, on her skin.

“Levy…”

“Grandma…?” Levy’s brow was pushing together in confusion.

“Sorry child, but no…” The voice had changed from that of her sweet grandmother’s, to a raspier old woman’s and Levy finally opened her eyes, only to see Porlyusica standing before her. Her head lifted in confusion as she glanced around, trying to remember where she was.

She had been asleep in a waiting chair at Magnolia Medical, for a few hours. Wendy was in the chair right beside her, her head sleeping against Levy’s shoulder. Carla was curled up on Levy’s lap, also asleep and keeping her warm. She could now feel the stiffness in her back and shoulders, as she continued to blink in the bright lights of the hospital. Her head tilted in confusion, her brow still pushed together. Her head felt like it was pounding, as she glanced back up to the pink haired, old woman, standing in front of her.

“Sorry…” She muttered groggily. “You smell like her…” Levy managed as she leaned forwards some, causing Wendy and Carla to stir with her movements. The old woman was watching her and for a moment, Levy could swear she looked sad. It almost seemed like she was about to say something too, but then Wendy yawned very loudly instead, killing the moment.

“Ughh…” The young girl was moaning, as she rubbed her one eye. Carla jumped down from Levy’s lap and did a cat stretch. “What time is it?”

“We will be going home here, in a few minutes Wendy, but first…” Porlyusica responded sternly, before then looking back up to Levy. “The patient is ready.” She addressed. Levy’s eyes immediately perked up at this news and she was quickly on her feet at once. She took hold of Porlyusica’s hand, before the old woman could even stop her.

“I can’t thank you enough for helping Gajeel, Porlyusica… Really, thank you! What can I ever do, to repay you…?!?” Levy was exclaiming, as Wendy also stood up from her chair.

“You can promise me, you won’t ever let this happen again…” Porlyusica stated, making Levy’s smile gently fade. “That man is bad… You should stay away from him.” Levy glanced down at this. She was still holding onto the old woman’s hand; a very small and bitter smile was creeping its way onto her face. She glanced back up, to match eyes with the old woman and then she nodded her head.

“Yea… Yes.” She replied, shaking her head. Wendy was watching the exchange with her mouth open in confusion. “You are right... I will... I will stay away from him, after all of this.” Levy managed, finally letting go of the old woman’s hand.
Porlyusica could see the slight amount of pain, flash across Levy’s eyes, as she seemed to distance herself away from the situation. Her hands were going together in front of her.

“Now, will you please take me to him?” Levy asked modestly, still with the same fake smile over her face. Her eyes stayed glossy and distant though, and right then Porlyusica knew… She knew it could not be helped and so she just simply nodded, before turning to lead the way.

The three women, followed by Carla, made their way back towards the room. Levy started to jog ahead, when she noticed the door was left wide open. Worry was suddenly coming over her, that Gajeel may have left without telling her. She could see him disappearing on her again, just like before in her apartment.

She stepped before the threshold of the door and looked inside, but thankfully he was still there. He was sitting in the dark again, still on the bed. Except this time, he had his right arm in a sling. He looked up once he saw the shadow of her petite form, in the bright doorway.

“Levy…” He questioned. Her one hand was settled on the doorway as she just stood there and took in the sight of him. Her eyes scaling over his whole being, just to make sure he really was, doing okay.

*He looks… He looks so much better…* She realized with relief washing over her so powerfully, that she felt herself gripping at her own chest. *Thank god…* She thought, before practically stumbling forwards into the room. Gajeel’s eyes widened, as he watched her nearly fall.

“Are ya okay shrimp?!” He exclaimed with slight concern, but he wasn’t able to get another word out, as Levy basically just jumped forwards and wrapped her tiny arms around his neck. She was holding onto him so tightly with her tiny warm body, that he couldn’t even move, he was so shocked. Porlyusica and Wendy were now watching, as Levy’s head buried into Gajeel’s good shoulder. Her tears were damping his shirt and she began to speak.

“I was so worried…” She spoke in a muffled voice, before finally pulling away quickly and placing her hands on either side of Gajeel’s face. Then before he could react, she was kissing him. Kissing him, before he could even hope to stop her. Before he could even grasp what was happening.

Wendy was watching the pair kiss, with her mouth falling wide open and her cheeks turning bright red. That was until her grandmother grabbed her by the shoulder and yanked her out into the hallway with her, thus leaving the two alone. Porlyusica was shaking her head, once her, Wendy and Carla were out in the hall. She had known all along that her words were falling on deaf ears, but what else was new…

Levy’s soft lips were finally pulling away, but her face stayed close. Her grip over Gajeel’s face was tight. Almost as if she were hanging onto him for dear life. Her forehead was settling against his and Gajeel felt like he might never breathe again.

“Please…” He could feel her shutter with grief. “Don’t ever do this to me, again.” She requested softly. “Not sure, I can take it…” She told him honestly and her wet eyes were meeting his, staring cross-eyed and he found that he still, could not speak. Hell, he still wasn’t even breathing.

She might as well, have killed him right then and there. And so instead, he just nodded slightly,
because she was still waiting… Waiting for his reply and that was all he could manage. Then she pressed her lips to his gently, once more.

*This…* Gajeel could feel his chest constricting violently, as Levy kissed him. The feeling was painful, just like the muscle spasms he had been feeling in his shoulder that night, but far worse actually.

*This hurts…* He thought. *Like hell…*

“The only true pain of this world is born out of love.”

Came the voice of Metalicana once more, in Gajeel’s head. He could see his father’s smirking face as the memory took form again.

“And that kinda pain attacks from the inside Gajeel, so it can’t be helped…” His father’s voice continued. “But anything coming from the outside…” Metalicana had now managed to get the metal stud inside his arm, and he was now twisting it, with a pair of long plyers. “Well, that’s just a sign…” He added.

“A sign of what..?” Gajeel asked his brow lowering in confusion. None of what his dad was saying, really made any sense to him at all, but he still wanted to know, because he felt like his father was including him on some sort of special secret. Metalicana looked back up to his son’s face. His smirk had become a wide toothy grin.

“A sign that I am still alive, to feel it.” He finished. Gajeel paused after hearing that, his eyes glancing down towards the floor as Metalicana finally looked back down, to finish screwing in the stud.

“But dad…” Gajeel continued, just as Metalicana had just about finished his work. “What if you don’t love anyone and-?”

“A man who has no love…” Metalicana interjected, before Gajeel could finish. “For anyone or anything… Is a man to be greatly feared, Gajeel.”

“Why?” Gajeel asked and at that Metalicana was once again turning towards the young boy. His head lowered, his silver eyes were digging deep into his son’s confused stare.

“Because a man who has no love in his heart, is the very definition of a Monster.”

Levy’s lips were still moving over his softly and that was when Gajeel knew, he was indeed feeling that pain, but he couldn’t possibly fathom it.

*Can’t be…* He thought, but he knew he was kidding himself, as he began to feel Levy pull away from him again. Her head was moving back and away. Their kiss had ended and she was looking at him again, before wrapping her arms tightly around him once more.

His heart was pounding so hard; he was sure she could hear it.
He knew in that moment, that he was completely in love with her.

Chapter End Notes

Open up and let me in
Show the bruises on your skin
Let the fires all burn out
I can hear the silent shout in you
Let it go don’t be so scared
Find the love you lost again
Let the chaos disappear
Don’t you know I’m always here for you?

Cause this is devotion, I am lost
You're the only one I see
Our bodies in motion, I am caught
Floating in your gravity
Whenever you break, I'll fix it for you
I’m the one who drives to you at night
And maybe we'll fall a little deeper
I think our little hearts will be alright
Cause this is devotion

Tell me what you dream about
I lose you in my sleep, somehow
Let the chaos disappear
Don't you know I'm always there for you?

Cause this is devotion, I am lost
You're the only one I see
Our bodies in motion, I am caught
Floating in your gravity
Whenever you break, I'll fix it for you
I'm the one who drives to you at night
And maybe we'll fall a little deeper
I think our little hearts will be alright
Cause this is devotion

Cause this is devotion, I am lost
You're the only one I see
Our bodies in motion, I am caught
Floating in your gravity

Cause this is devotion, I am lost
You're the only one I see
Our bodies in motion, I am caught
Floating in your gravity
Whenever you break, I'll fix it for you
I'm the one who drives to you at night
And maybe we'll fall a little deeper
I think our little hearts will be alright
Cause this is devotion

“Devotion” By Ellie Goulding – The song I chose for Jerza’s story and this chapter
Harmony

Chapter Summary

Gajeel pushes Levy away as he is burdened with his feelings. Jose's new plot is revealed and it has Erza losing her cool. Gajeel and Levy come together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 14: Harmony

Wow... This weighs a ton...! Levy was gasping internally. Her small frame was struggling to lift a full bag of garbage up from the kitchen floor of the 8-Island restaurant. Both of her tiny hands were wrapped tightly around the tied knot of plastic and turning white, as she continued to try and heave it up with her stick-like arms. Droy all the while, was standing there watching the endeavor. Concern obvious over his features, after just having been the one to actually lift the bag out of the garbage bin for her.

“Are you sure you got that?” He asked as Levy finally managed to yank the bag all of the way up, but the weight of it very nearly made her fall over. Luckily, she caught herself with some quick footwork. She turned to look at him, the large bag now balancing carefully over her spine and shoulder, so she wouldn’t lean too far over to one side.

“Yea...” She panted.

“Really, Levy? Cause...”

“It’s fine Droy!” She chimed. “It’s my closing duty, I got it!” She added lightly, turning away from him again to head towards the back door of the kitchen. Droy stood there watching her waddle away slowly, like a drunk person, as Levy tried her best to keep the bag up and not tip over.

“What was that?” Came an annoyed voice from behind him. Droy turned to see Jet standing there. He was also clad in his 8-Island uniform, with his arms folded in disappointment.

“What?” Droy questioned, his tone already sounding defensive. Jet then gestured towards the direction Levy had gone with one hand.

“Why did you let her do that?” He then replied, with irritation.

“Well what the heck did you want me to do, Jet?!” Droy shrugged, his voice becoming equally annoyed. “She insisted on me, letting her, do it! She said she only wanted help with taking it out of
the trash can!” Droy snapped back.

“Tell her ‘no’ you moron!” Jet snapped, as he bopped Droy on the head with his knuckles. “I mean hell! Did you see her?! She could barely stand up with that bag!” Jet added, his arms flying out with frustration.

“Well maybe, I’m just not as controlling as you are!” Droy shouted back.

“It’s not about being controlling, you idiot! It’s about being a gentleman!”

Levy was rolling her eyes, she could still hear their voices echoing throughout the kitchen, as they continued to argue over her. All the way up until she reached the back vault door of the restaurant. Once there, she settled for leaning her back, with the bag, up against the door to push it open. The door flew open fast from the sudden weight, Levy then quickly moved out of its radius. She turned slightly to watch it slam shut behind her, before letting out a small breath of relief, now that she could no longer hear her two best friends fighting.

The cool air felt nice, after just having to run around the restaurant all day, carrying large trays of food. Now all she needed to do was finish up the rest of her closing duties and then she could finally go home for the night. Maybe get started on her term paper or do some studying. Heck, maybe even some recreational reading as a well-deserved break. She could most definitely use that right about now.

“Yea…” Levy was sighing to herself longingly. A small smile was gracing her lips, as she thought about finally getting back to the book she was currently reading. All she wanted to do was, get done, go home and relax. Her feet were killing her from working a double that day, but it had been worth it, for the amount of money she had made in tips that night, at least.

She was walking carefully, so as not to trip with the large bag still hovering over her one shoulder. She was slowly approaching the big dumpster, that was just around the corner from where the back door of the building was. She finally stopped just before it, her arms basically throwing themselves down, along with the heavy bag she had been holding. It was now sitting on the concrete as Levy regained her breath and let her aching arms and hands recover for a minute. Her head tilted back some, as she looked to the sky.

It was a clear March night. Peaceful, with light jacket-like temperatures. There was hardly a cloud lining the sky, just a few stars tossed around here and there. Levy finally glanced back down at the bag in front of her, after taking that short moment to rest. Ready to attempt her go, at getting the heavy bag of garbage, into the tall dumpster.

She wrapped both of her hands around the knot and then heaved it up as best as she could, problem was she couldn’t get it high enough. She stumbled against the rim of the dumpster, very nearly losing her balance, but luckily, she was able to catch herself on the side of the bin. The trash bag fell back down to the ground, with a thud. Levy stood up straight again. Eyeing the bag once more with annoyance, before stepping towards it and leaning back down to pick it up. She pulled it up once more, this time her body was rocking as she attempted to swing the bag up and into the air. Her fingers released, letting it fly, but all it did was hit the side of the dumpster and then fall back down and roll towards her feet.

Levy’s eyebrows were lowering with determination.

Okay, that’s it bag! You’re going to get it now! She thought as her hands grabbed at it, rather
aggressively this time, before she finally began shoving it up the rim of the dumpster with all of her strength. She was still struggling to get it up high enough. Her small body making it especially difficult to get the damn thing up and over the wall of the bin, as she continued to push against it, even with the use of her elbows.

“Come on! Go in!” She was raging between clenched teeth, as she could feel it getting stuck on the little lip that protruded out from the edges of the dumpster.

“Gi hi!” Levy’s arms stiffened up at the sound. Her head froze and her eyes grew wide. “Havin’ some issues there, shrimp?”

Levy jumped back at the voice, causing the bag she had just been holding, to sequentially land on the ground for a third time. She spun around quickly, only to spot the large frame of Gajeel standing there. He had two leather clad hands, shoved into the pockets of a pair of black cargo pants. He was wearing a charcoal gray T-shirt, that was tucked into the belted waistline of his pants, the fabric of it looking tight over the wide span of his chest. Over top of that he had on a slick, black zip up hoodie with gray fur trim around the hood. Then to top off his look were his usual steel toed boots, the hem of his pants shoved into them like normal.

He was standing a few feet away from her, a fang revealing grin over his face. His red eyes were gleaming with amusement, upon matching Levy’s doe-like stare back towards him.

“Gajeel?!” She was questioning him with disbelief. Her head was tilting to the side, her eyes squinting at him upon recognition.

“Gi hi, in the flesh shrimp.” He laughed again, his grin only growing. Levy’s mouth was falling open. Her body was still tense from the shock of his once again, random appearance in her life, but it only lasted for about a second this time, before her annoyance with him was pulling ahead of it. Her one eyebrow was lifting with agitation as she looked him over with perplexity.

“Oh yea? And how long have you been standing there exactly?” She asked, her tone sounding more like a warning now. Her hip was jutting out to one side, as her arms folded.

“Since you walked out here basically…” Gajeel stated simply, unashamed by his answer. “Jus enjoyin’ the show really…” He added, his body gesturing towards her. He of course, was referring to her battle with the unruly garbage bag.

“Oh really?!” Levy was questioning him, her volume lifting.

“Yea.” He answered bluntly. “Ya got my attention easily, with the racket you were makin’ over here. Guess you can be a noisy little thing sometimes, huh?” He replied rather matter-of-factly, his grin only growing and he truly sounded amused. Levy meanwhile, did not look pleased.

“Well…” She replied glancing away with a roll of her eyes. “Glad I could serve as ‘entertainment’ to you, Gajeel…” She added rather skeptically, her eyes landing back on him with agitation.

“Ya don’t even know the half of it shrimp…” He replied rather suggestively. His voice was lowering along with his eyes, as they took particular care in scaling over Levy’s body, while she was dawned in the short skirt that was her 8-Island uniform. His own body was leaning forwards some, only to further emphasize his point.

Levy snapped her head away, if only to break eye contact with him. Her cheeks were flushing with heat, as her eyelids lowered and she glanced down towards the ground in exasperation.

“Nice get up, by the way.” She heard him add slyly and she was pleased with her decision, to not be
looking at his face, when he had said it.

“Oh, don’t even start…” She muttered in clear embarrassment. “What the heck are you even doing here anyways, Gajeel?” She questioned, still refusing to look back up at him. “I mean, how am I supposed to believe that you aren’t following me, when you pop up just about everywhere I go…?”

“I could say the same to you, ya know?” She heard him say and his tone sounded less amused this time.

She could hear his heavy footsteps moving towards her. She turned her head back up to look at him. The heat in her face was growing considerably, once she got a look at how serious his expression had become. His grin was gone, only to be replaced with a slight frown.

Levy stiffened once he was within a few steps of her. Her whole body was on high alert, because try as she might, she still didn’t trust him. Even after he had been kind enough, to repair and return the book she had lost. She couldn’t really. Knowing who he was and what he did for a living. The whole lot of it, just made her far too uneasy.

 Thankfully he had stopped moving any closer. He was now just out of arms reach of her. His one eye was dead locked to her face and Levy found, that she needed to look back down and away again. His gaze was too intense, for her liking.

“You always seem ta show up, wherever I go too… Why is that…?” He questioned. His voice was titillating and for a moment, it was almost as if he were truly seeking an answer to the question. Like he was accusing her of something suggestive and Levy could only remain silent. Her eyes still not daring to glance back up at him, an awkward frown appearing over her face.

Did he really believe she was *trying* to see him? Levy was seriously wondering that, up until the point, Gajeel finally broke the tension filled silence with another dumb comment.

“Fer all I know, YOU’RE the stalker…!”

This of course, set Levy off immediately. Her head jerked back up and she shot him a furious look. “Don’t be ridiculous!” She raged, her body was moving into an angry ready stance. Her hands were turning into fists as she yelled up at him rather loudly. Gajeel stuck a pinky finger into his one ear and spun it. A sign that the volume of her voice was clearly getting to him, as she continued to holler. “I work here, you jerk!” She yelled, her face still red and heated. She was panting from the sudden fury that had burned through her, with the stupidity of Gajeel’s comment. Why on earth, had she ever thought he could be serious for even one minute? He was way too frustrating.

“Ohh… No kiddin’?” Gajeel replied, both sarcastically and bemused. “So… Working hard on a Saturday night then?” He questioned. His one arm was stretching back and around his shoulders. He appeared to be scratching the back of his neck. “Man… Why am I not surprised? You really don’t have a social life at all, do ya? What’s with that?” He finished with a sigh, as his one arm was coming back down and over his chest, so that he could fold the two of them together.

“Oh, just give it a rest!” Levy snapped turning away from him finally, with a huff. She waved her hand, as if she were physically brushing his comments away. “And no! I don’t exactly have time to go out… Not when I need to work, so I can make the rent payment each month…” She was walking towards the discarded garbage bag as her voice trailed off. Gajeel’s eyes were following the movement of her shoulder blades with intrigue, right up and to the point where she finally stopped, with the large bag just at her feet. She appeared to be looking down at it, contemplating her next move.
“Oi’! Did I hit a nerve or somethin’?” Gajeel questioned and she could hear the amusement still there, in his voice. “So, what? Don’t get all offended. It’s not like it’s a big deal-” Levy was bending over to grab at the knot of the garbage bag, so that she could then turn the whole thing right side up. Gajeel was glancing away from her, once he realized his gaze was no longer fixated on her shoulders. “Er anything…”

Meanwhile Levy had just managed to heave the heavy bag up. Her body was straightening back up to its normal height as best as she could manage, while still being so greatly weighed down by what she was holding. She still had her back turned towards Gajeel and so, she couldn’t help but roll her eyes at what he was saying.

“So, what?” She repeated his words, her frustration apparent. She had turned her upper body part ways, so that she could meet his eye, even if her lower half and the bag weren’t coming with it.

Gajeel’s eyes widened a bit once he got a look at Levy’s irritated face.

“Don’t bother telling me, to not get offended.” She wasn’t yelling, but her voice was very adamant. “You don’t have a single clue about what I am trying to accomplish. I am trying to pay my way through school.” Her hands were lowering with the bag. No longer stationary by its weight, she turned her body the rest of the ways, to face him fully. “I am trying to graduate with honors. I am trying to get into medical school and become a doctor… Do you have any idea, how difficult that all, is…?” She asked. Her stance was strong, her shoulders square and her eyes narrowed. “And here I am, having to listen to your poor judgements of me, based on what? Nothing really.” She added definitively, turning abruptly away from him, at last.

Both of her hands were wrapping tightly around the knot of the bag once more. Her body was moving back towards the dumpster. She had resorted to just dragging the garbage bag behind her, along the cement. The noise of it, was like clanking glass and plastic zipping. Gajeel’s eyes were still on her, his fascination only growing as she continued to speak.

“I still don’t understand why you are even here right now, Gajeel.” She added with her back still facing him. She had stopped just before the dumpster and was now beginning the painful task of trying to lift the bag up, for the umpteenth time, but it wasn’t going well. “I need you to just go away and leave me alone…” She let out a small frustrated growl, as her shoulder shoved into the plastic bag that was now planted against the wall of the dumpster. She was trying like hell to keep it from falling down the small amount of distance to the ground, that she had managed to get it up from. “So, I can finish my work and go home…” She was exhaling as she said this last part to him. Her current efforts were suddenly in vain, as her balance faltered under the weight. Causing her shoulder to hit the wall of the dumpster with a thud. The bag slipped free from her grasp and ultimately fell to ground once again. Leaving Levy to just stand there and stare at it, with her exhausted arms lowered in defeat. A hopeless sigh was escaping her lips.

Her consistent failure of something that should have been such a simple task for just about anyone else, was so laughable at this point, that it made her feel like a joke. That bag was taunting her, just as Gajeel had been, not moments ago. And just like everything else she was working towards in her life, it was so incredibly difficult. She could swear, all of the words she had just spoken to him about her constant efforts and everything she was trying to do and achieve, were just hanging there. Over her head. Making her feel like such a fool for even speaking them to him, in the first place. Reminding her, that they might always be just out of her reach, no matter how hard she might try and get to them, just like the damn dumpster. They left shadows there, on the floor beside her, so she could never forget that.

Levy’s eyes widened once she realized, that the shadow she had been feeling, hovering over her,
was indeed real and not one she had dreamt up to fit her line of thinking. There was hardly time for her to jump, before Gajeel’s large frame came reaching from somewhere behind her. His one hand was grabbing at the knot of the discarded garbage bag, near Levy’s feet and lifting it clear over both of their heads.

Levy’s mouth fell open in both awe and shock, though she was still a bit unsettled by the fact, that she hadn’t even heard him approach. She was still staring up at the bag, that was now floating just above her head, with amazement. Her eyes then followed the path down from Gajeel’s arm to his face, with disbelief. He was only sending her a pointed glare in return, his brow low. An expression she didn’t know how to take, until she was startled by the action of him just carelessly tossing the enormous bag; that up until that moment, had been the current source of all of her problems, right into the dumpster with ease.

Now, it probably took at least a few more seconds of staring at the dumpster in complete and utter astonishment, before Levy’s brain was able to catch up with the current state of things. Once that was done, she was finally turning back around to at least acknowledge Gajeel, for what he had just done. Who in return, was still just staring back at her, with that same blank glare.

Levy’s mouth was still agape, as Gajeel lowered his bag tossing arm, and then said nothing. There was silence between the two of them, as they continued to stare at one another. Both party members unsure of what they should say, until at long last, it was finally Gajeel who could no longer stand to be quiet in such a situation.

“What?!” He finally demanded defensively, at Levy’s gaping face. “Why the hell are you lookin’ at me, like that?!” This finally slapped some sense into the girl, as her jaw snapped shut.

“What do you mean, ‘what’?!” She asked, throwing his same attitude, right back at him. “Why did you do that, that’s what?!” Levy suddenly asked. Her voice was just as riled up as Gajeel’s had been. She was pointing to the dumpster behind her.

“Are you kiddin’ me?!” Gajeel exclaimed, his hands going out. “That was painful, watchin’ you try and do that! I couldn’t take it anymore, it was drivin’ me nuts!” Levy’s mouth about fell open again, in surprise. His response, certainly not having been what she had expected.

“Hold on, wait…! I thought you said it was funny? I thought you said, you were enjoying it?” She added, her one eyebrow lifting with the second question.

“Oi’ Can’t you take a joke?!” Gajeel questioned her through his frustration. “It mighta been funny fer ‘bout the first two minutes of it, but after a while… Hell no! I know I can be an asshole and all, but that was way too much… Even for me!” Gajeel explained. His arms folding as he looked to Levy, who was now watching him with her head tilted and her eyes slightly narrowed. Almost as if she couldn’t decide if he was lying to her or not. “But speaking of that shrimp… I gotta know… Since when the hell do you actually care what I think of you anyways, huh? Where did all of that come from, exactly?” Gajeel then asked, with a smirk forming over his face. His voice was teeming with interest.

“Wait what?” Levy finally asked back. Her mind recalling what it was, he had just said to her. “I don’t!” She exclaimed, instantly becoming angry again, before Gajeel could even make a remark. “You- You are just here! Bugging me! As if it’s become a regular thing, or something!” She was able to add, recovering quickly. Her eyebrows were crossing with frustration.

Gajeel’s smirk was turning into a clearly amused grin. His eyes were gleaming with excitement and Levy could feel her unease only growing once she noticed it.
“And why not? He suddenly asked. Levy had to pause at this, her one eyebrow was going up. Was he really suggesting, what she thought he was?

“Hold on… What?” Was all she could muster.

“We could make this a regular thing.” Gajeel offered with a smirk, his eyes still holding a bit of spark to them.

“Gajeel are you…? Are you asking me out right now?” Levy managed and it was right then that she was reminded of how close he was standing to her, as his head was lowering. His face was nearing hers.

Levy’s heart basically sprang up and out of her chest, from the sudden closeness. Her body was instinctively easing back, but there wasn’t really anywhere more for her to go, thanks to the dumpster being right behind her. Gajeel was smirking right at her now. His face was as evenly leveled with her own, as it was possibly going to get, while he was standing. His nose was only mere inches away from her forehead. She was trying to glance away from his eyes, so she could maybe focus on one of his face piercings instead, but she found it too difficult to look away, while he was so close.

“Gajeel…?” She muttered, her voice rattled.

“I like you.” He stated simply, his gaze fixated on her face. Levy could feel the heat flooding up from her neck and into her cheeks. Her heart was most definitely pounding and she may have been trembling somewhat, she really wasn’t sure. Never in her life had anyone ever been so blunt to her like that before, and in such a manner. She didn’t know what to do with it.

“I… I think I got that much…” She finally answered with a small half-hearted laugh. Her gaze was going downwards. Her voice was unusually high and rattled from the situation. Gajeel’s honesty really was too much to deal with at times, but at least now, he was finally standing upright and giving her, her space back, so she could exhale.

“So how bout it, shrimp?” He asked, his arms folding like normal. “I think we could have a lotta fun together.” He added, his eyes making a quick scan down her body and then back up to her face, his intentions made clear from the start. Levy was biting down, her nerves still getting the better of her, as she swallowed.

“Gajeel…” She finally managed tentatively. Was this really happening right now? Was she actually feeling a little bad, for what she was about to say to him, for turning him down? Black Steel Gajeel of all people… She looked back up to him, her large eyes sincere. “You are the last thing I need, right now…” She finished. Her composure still intact, despite the frantic beating of her heart.

Gajeel didn’t budge, it was almost as if he had expected as much. Instead he just came back with another unexpected question, that sounded more like a statement.

“But that’s why, you kind of want to, am I right?” He asked.

Levy’s mouth fell open at this, her brain not being able to comprehend words, let alone pronounce them. Gajeel didn’t say anything at first, but then finally after a few brief seconds of watching her and waiting, he sighed and unfolded his arms. He had looked down and then away for a moment, but when his eyes met hers again, he knew he had her full attention.

“Look… Do ya ever just wonder if you are wastin’ time workin’ as hard as you do?” He asked, his face and voice had become very serious and very un-Gajeel like. Levy felt a bit taken aback by the question, but she was far too interested in hearing what more he had to say next, to even argue with
him and so, Gajeel continued. “I mean sure you have goals… Noble ones at that… But…” He added glancing down, but then back up at her face again. “If you keep it up like you are… One day you are gonna find yourself wonderin’, if there was somethin’ you missed along the way… Somethin’ you woulda seen, if you hadn’t been bendin’ over backwards all of the time, to get where you are… And when that happens, you’ll find yourself questioning if the things you are doin’, even really matter to you anymore.”

The way he was looking at her once the words left his mouth, was almost alarming. Never had she ever expected to hear something as profound as that, from Gajeel of all people. It was almost like he was trying to warn her of something, but she hadn’t any idea of what it could be. Levy’s eyes narrowed, her mind going over what he had just said again.

No… Why would I…? I know what I am working towards is right for me… It’s never been a question… Her thoughts spoke. The more Levy thought about it, the more offended she was becoming by Gajeel’s words, as they continued to sink in. He was coming from a place of ignorance. He just had to be, because this was all based on more of his skewed perceptions of her, surely. There was no way someone like him, could understand the reasons for why she was doing, what she was. They were deeply personal after all and it wasn’t as if Gajeel knew her in that way, by any means. They were just two people, who kept on passing each other by.

“What are you trying to prove, Gajeel?” Levy finally asked, after considering everything he had just said to her. Her voice sounded a bit annoyed. “Are you just trying to say anything you can think of, to get my attention or something?” Levy questioned, her hand landing over her heart. She was becoming more passionate by the second. “I know what I am doing is right!” She exclaimed, her hand was lowering again. “I’ve been planning for this, for most of my life and my reasons are deeply personal, but they matter to me! They always will!”

“Levy.” Gajeel declared her name loud enough to interrupt, and to calm her down, before she became too upset. “I believe you.” He stated simply in his deep voice. Levy stared up at him, with her eyes shining like she might cry.

“Then why would you say something like that to me?” She asked in outrage.

“Because I wish someone would have said it to me…” He answered plainly.

Levy’s arms fell back down to her sides, all thanks to the surprising, yet sullen confession Gajeel had just made. And that was the very first time she could ever remember sensing regret, emanating from him. For what reason, she was never sure of, but she seemed to understand that he somehow blamed himself for it.

“Gajeel… What is it that-?”

“Just forget it.” He stated a bit coldly, interrupting her, just so there could be no more discussion about it. His brow had lowered over his eyes. His expression had become a bit distant for the moment, but it eased again, once he matched eyes with her. “If you really want to know what I think… I think it suits you…” He added, his voice lighter again. Levy shot him a glance of misunderstanding, so Gajeel clarified. “Your goal. I respect it.” His lips were beginning to upturn into a tiny smirk as he continued. “And I think you will make a good doctor someday, shrimp. I already know you care a lot more ‘bout people, than they deserve.” He added, his smirk widening into a sincere smile, which wasn’t something Levy was accustomed to seeing on Gajeel’s face.

It caused her to sheepishly lower her gaze away from him, a flush still lingering over her cheeks. His sudden compliments and the way that he was looking at her, doing nothing to resolve her confusion
towards him.

She hadn’t expected him to be so nice to her again like this. It reminded her of the night he had returned the book to her. The way he had been acting around her lately, made him seem like an almost normal human being. Was he just trying to flatter her as a way to win her over?

Levy stole a glance back up at him, her face still retaining its heat. She took in his sharp features. Normally she found them so intimidating, but tonight it was almost as if they were somehow charming. Levy’s eyelids lowered a bit, her stomach twisting into knots. He still had that same smile plastered over his face, and it was forcing her in a direction that she was very unsure about. She didn’t want to admit it, but his seemingly genuine flattery, was completely working on her. She could feel its effects on her emotions towards him and it was downright concerning.

She closed her eyes, letting out a tiny huff of air, just in an attempt to clear her head. She knew she would need to say something, to rebuttal the foreign thoughts away. Her eyes opened again as she looked back up at him. She was preparing to go on the defense, just in case.

“Thank you Gajeel…” She offered gently. “That was really… Well, sweet.” She added, sounding a bit put off. “But… I can’t help, but wonder… Why are you being so nice to me?” She then asked with some slight suspicion, her eyes narrowing on him again.

“Just statin’ the truth shrimp… Ya know me… I tell it, like it is… If I’m tellin anythin’ at all.” He answered arrogantly, his smirk reforming.

“Oh...” Levy replied, again not expecting such a simple response. She pondered him for a moment, before something else occurred to her. “Yea, speaking of that… You still never mentioned why you are here tonight, Gajeel...”

The two of them were now looking at each other, within a newfound silence. Gajeel’s brow seem to lower at the question and his smirk had disappeared. He did not appear too pleased with the redirection of conversation. Levy could only wonder why he appeared to be stonewalling her now, but she didn’t get a chance to ask him anything else, as a particular sound rang out in the night, alerting them both.

It was the familiar noise of the backdoor flying open and then slamming shut behind someone. Which could only mean that someone had joined them outback, but they couldn’t see who it was just yet, as they were still around the corner.

Oh great... I need to get Gajeel out of here, before someone sees him talking to me. Levy was thinking, not wishing to be associated with such a person as Gajeel. by the people she worked with. She glanced up at him and opened her mouth to speak, but Gajeel had already turned his head away. He was clearly listening to whomever had come outside and not seconds later, he was marching away from Levy, before she could even get the words out. Her hand had reached up towards him in distress, as he appeared to be going around the corner, to where the back door of the building was. This realization was causing Levy to panic. What the hell is he doing?!

“Gajeel…!” She was gasping his name in a loud whisper, so as not to be heard, but she was ignored. She then quickly began to trot after him. There was no acknowledgment on his part. In fact, it was almost as if Levy didn’t even exist to him in that moment, as he seemed to be too zeroed in, on something else. He arrived around the corner, with Levy right on his heels. They both got a forgiving look at the person who had just now come outside, without even being spotted.

He was a tall man, bald head and dark skinned. He wore glasses and the usual 8-Island work attire for males. He had his back turned towards them and that was why he hadn’t even bothered to notice
either one of the people watching him just yet. Levy wasn’t aware of his name just yet, but she did know of him. He was 8-Island’s most recently hired dishwasher. He worked the night shift. He had only just started working at the restaurant within the last week or so. And right now, he appeared to be taking a break outside, so he could smoke a cigarette. Levy and Gajeel could both see him attempting to light the cigarette with a small zippo lighter in his one hand.

Levy’s eyes were moving from the man she worked with, back to Gajeel who was standing just in front of her. She was about ready to grab him at this point and just pull him away and back into cover. Her mind was racing, but once again, Gajeel didn’t give her the chance to do anything, as he was already moving in on the man in question, with a fierce look in his eye.

“Wait!” Levy was calling after him, her hand reaching out. The sound of her voice, causing the dishwasher to turn around. Only to be met with Gajeel’s terrifyingly angry face, planted right in front of him. There was a grunt, followed by a short yell that was cut off, with the force of Gajeel’s strike. His one forearm, had gone colliding into the man’s throat. His other hand had grabbed the man’s arm near the elbow and was twisting it, as his weight came pile driving Levy’s unsuspecting coworker, into the wall of the building they were standing outside of. Now Gajeel had the man forcibly pinned against the bricks. His arm lying across the man’s neck, applying pressure. His other hand was holding the dishwasher’s arm out by his side, just threatening to bend his elbow the wrong direction at any moment, with a quick little twist.

Levy’s eyes had become large ovules, as she looked on in horror. Her brain was struggling to wrap around what it was, that Gajeel was now doing. Not seconds ago, the two of them had been talking like everything was perfectly normal. Gajeel had even come across as so kind in those few minutes, that Levy had been beginning to think differently of him and now here he was… Doing this, to a man she worked with. It was a harsh reminder of every horrible thing about him, that she had been conveniently letting herself forget, all the while he had been singing her praises and asking her to consider what it might be like, to be with him.

“Finally found ya! You son of bitch! Yer either comin’ with me tonight or I’m puttin’you in the hospital!” Gajeel was declaring, as the man stared at him with tears forming in his eyes, his glasses had fallen to ground and cracked. He was struggling to breathe as Gajeel grinned at him madly.

Levy’s feet were moving. There wasn’t really time for her to dwell on what was happening anymore and so she just acted instead. Running towards the spot where Gajeel had her coworker pinned against the wall.

Can’t… She was thinking. Gasping, so afraid. I can’t let this happen…! She appeared just behind Gajeel’s shoulder.

“Gajeel!” She was shouting, her voice cracking with emotion. “Stop! What are you doing?!” She watched as Gajeel’s crazy grin, instantly vanished. Now his teeth were biting down in frustration.

“Go away Levy!” He barked. The terrified man’s eyes were slowly drifting over to where Levy was standing. Desperation was shining within them, as he tried to speak against Gajeel’s arm pressing into his throat, but he just couldn’t form the words with the lack of air.

“Don’t you dare look at her… You bastard! You keep yer eyes on me!” Gajeel snapped. Twisting the man’s arm some, which caused his victims eyes to slam shut in pain and for him to let out a gurgling sound of restraint. “Nobody can help you now…” Gajeel growled. “You’ve got yer self a date with the devil…”

“Gajeel!” Levy was shouting his name. Tears were already streaming down her face, she was starting to become hysterical. “You have to stop! I’m not going to let you do this!”
Gajeel’s head snapped around, his eyes landing right over her. Levy felt her stomach drop at the chilling expression he was portraying to her. His eyes were wide and crazed, much like the first night she had met him, but he was also not smiling this time. Instead he just seemed very, very angry.

“How are you goin’ ta stop me!?” Gajeel then asked her, wildly. The color was draining from Levy’s face, as he said this.

He was right, completely right. She couldn’t do a damn thing to actually stop him. And so, she said nothing, suddenly too afraid to even speak. “Levy…” He stated her name again. His voice was a bit softer, but still deep and intimidating. “You don’t know this man… He works for Jose.”

“No!” Levy found her voice; her head was shaking. Her chest was heaving with panic. “I know him, he works here!” Levy was crying out.

“And for how long!?” Gajeel shouted the question at her. His loud voice startling her again. “How long has he been working here huh!? A few days?! A week!?” Levy just stared at him with her mouth open and tears still leaking down her cheeks. “His name is Boze! He fled from our organization about half a week ago! He has just been tryin’ to hide from us, this whole entire time… Wherever he can.” Gajeel explained, finally turning his head back around, so he could face the man in his grasp. Gajeel’s arm was now pushing even harder onto the man’s throat, so that he could only let out another strangled gurgle. “But not anymore… Cause I fuckin’ found you… You little twat.” Gajeel was seething as he said this. His grin had slowly returned, as continued to do hurt the poor man, only seeming to revel in the power he had over his helpless victim.

Levy was watching as the man’s complexion began to change, his skin was purpling from the lack of air. Her mind was trying to catch up with what Gajeel had just said. If it was true, then that meant, that this man was probably a criminal too, just like Gajeel and equally as much trouble. The tears were staining her face, she could feel the heat of her situation, but really, it didn’t matter. She couldn’t let this go on right in front of her. Gajeel was going to take this man back to Jose and something horrible was going to happen to him, that much she knew. Just like the man named, Bora.

“Please!” She began again, now begging him. She grabbed at the back of Gajeel’s hoodie with her one hand, trying her hardest to somehow pull him away. A useless attempt on her part, to maybe give the suffering man some slight relief so that he might be able to breathe again. Gajeel of course stayed firmly planted where he was, his feet unmoving, but he did turn his head back around to glance at her. “I can’t…” She was panting, as she continued to pull on him. “I won’t let you do this!” She hollered at him. Her eyes were slamming shut, as she tried to tug at him with both of her little hands now, wrapped around the fabrics of Gajeel’s hoodie. “You monster!” She then screamed, her voice echoing loudly into the night.

Gajeel’s eyes widened once he heard the words and just like that, the arm he had, had up against the man’s throat, eased. The dishwasher gasped for some much-needed air. Levy stood there frozen, as Gajeel’s head went down. His eyes were still wide as he stared at the ground. His arms fell down to his sides, finally freeing his victim completely. The dishwasher Boze, who used to work for Jose, put both of his hands up to his throat as he continued to gasp for air with agony.

*He actually did it...* Came Levy’s thoughts, she couldn’t believe it. *He actually did let him go...* She was in shock and she couldn’t even bring herself to move, just as Gajeel also hadn’t budged. And for the moment, it almost seemed like it may have all been over right then and there. That was until, Gajeel’s hand suddenly went flying out, not seconds later. Grabbing rather aggressively, at the collar of the gasping dishwasher’s, work shirt. Levy jumped again, as she watched Gajeel yank the man’s face, right up to his own. His teeth were clamped down in fury and his hair was bristling back behind him, like that of a viscous animal’s fur.
“Listen…” He was growling lowly between teeth, just barely containing his anger. “Leave town. Now.” He ordered with a seething breath to Boze’s fearful eyes. “And don’t come back! If I hear word of you bein’ round here again, I’ll be comin’ back for yer ass myself, and you can bet that Jose will be the least of yer problems!” He snapped, his arm finally going out and behind him, as he basically threw the man away from where him and Levy were standing.

Boze stumbled over his own two feet from the force of Gajeel’s push, and ultimately ended up falling to the ground on his hands and knees. He stole one last frightened glance back up at Gajeel, who was standing there with his head lowered and his fists clenched tightly on either side of his large frame. His shoulders were upright and tense, his brow low, as he stared at the ground in front of him. Just waiting, with his back turned towards the man he had chosen to spare on Levy’s behalf. Finally, Boze jumped to his feet and took off at a run, almost tripping again as he began to sprint away.

Levy could only listen to his footsteps, her body basically trembling from the event that had just occurred. Her eyes were closed tightly. The tears around them were drying. Her heart was pounding, as her arms folded in on themselves. It almost appeared as if she were cold amongst the silence, but really, she had just become that afraid.

Gajeel also hadn’t moved. He was just standing there, still in his clenched position, mulling things over. Wondering why he had chosen to listen to Levy and let Boze go. Thinking about what it might cost him if Jose somehow found out, what he had just done. Hoping that Boze would at least follow his advice, otherwise it might get them both killed. Then finally, Levy’s shivering voice broke through his thoughts once more.

“Just when I was starting to think better of you…” She spoke softly, her words still deeply rattled. “I have to witness you doing something like this…” He could tell that she was crying, just from the way she had sounded. Gajeel finally turned back to face her, his expression had eased considerably, but he could still read her fear. And unlike in the past, it was not at all, amusing to him tonight. And yet… He was beginning to smirk anyways. Something just came over him, it was almost like a defense mechanism.

“You were the one who said it…” He stated firmly, finally getting her to open her eyes back up, to look at him again. “I am a monster.” He told her, his smirk widening into a full out, fang revealing grin. Levy was just staring up at him, her eyes red and glossy. Her cheeks puffy from the crying. She didn’t seem afraid anymore, instead she just appeared to be completely numb.

They were walking, the two of them alone with the exception of the snow that was still falling like thick glittery specks. It was the wee hours of morning, still dark. Snow was piling up on the ground, leaving proof of their endeavors for the night in the form of a line of footsteps. Creating a path from Magnolia Medical’s dock entrance, to over and down the sidewalks of town. The weather and the state of Gajeel’s injuries, forcing Levy and Gajeel to be slow, as they made their way down a nearby street. Having just left the hospital only a measly fifteen minutes beforehand and yet… Gajeel knew he was already dying.

His body was exhausted and his injuries, though they had now been treated properly, were still extensive and very painful. Despite this, he refused to let Levy help him walk, like he had the past two times before. Instead he had chosen to remain on his own two feet, even after Levy had fought with him, quite fiercely over the subject.

He didn’t care, things were different now. He couldn’t stand to be, that near to her, not after the way she had kissed him in the hospital. Not after the way she had held him, cried for him and begged him
to ‘never do that to her again’.

Gajeel was cringing at the memory of it. No… She needed to stay away, because this was all just too much.

He was studying her, the back of her head. His eyes squinting among the falling snow, following the swooping paths of her disheveled blue hair. She was walking just ahead of him, because that was what he had demanded of her. Just keep walking he had said, no matter what. No matter how much he fell behind, or how much he struggled to keep up, or to breathe, but she wasn’t listening. He could tell, because she was basically dragging her feet.

That night, he had been remembering, the one where she had called him ‘a monster’. It was currently playing feverishly on loop in his head, pecking at his brain like a crow picks at something dead on the side of the road. He didn’t know how to comprehend it anymore.

This was Levy in front of him, the very same girl from that night. The one who had seen him, for what he really was and had then called him out on it. There was no way she could have possibly forgotten about that time, right? He sure as hell couldn’t have, so then why now? Why was she doing all of this? Acting like she cared so much for him and getting his hopes up. Kissing him.

Every time he thought about it, his chest would begin to hurt. So much so, that he was grabbing at it with his good hand. His eyes were closing tightly and his face was cringing from the pain.

Levy noticed, because she had stopping walking. Stopped, to turn around and watch Gajeel almost double over in pain. Her large eyes were growing all the wider with concern, as she began to make her way over to him quickly.

“Stop…!” Gajeel huffed out, before she could reach him. He panted a bit, his eyes opening to glare at her from underneath a low brow. “Don’t…” He got out in a haggard breath. “Just… Turn around… Keep walking…”

“Gajeel… Please…. Why are you being like this?” She asked, her voice sounded hurt, but he could tell she was more worried for him than anything else. He was exhaling deeply, his eyes closing and his patience hard to reach.

Please just stay away Levy... He was thinking, as he opened his eyes and looked at her again.

She looked so sad. Her eyes were glossing over from the cold, or from tears that may have been forming. It was probably a mixture of both. She had already cried so much for him that evening. Her nose and cheeks were red and raw looking. Quite the contrary from her normally white and creamy looking skin. And she was beautiful, as always. It actually made him feel sick to see her look at him, like that. For her to be so damn worried about him, and constantly asking him if he needed her help. His stomach was just a mess over it. His new-found awareness of his feelings for her, were wreaking havoc on his brain and his body. He didn’t know how much more of it he could take. He just felt so damn weak in her presence now.

“Just keep goin’, damn it! Like I’ve already told you ten fuckin’ times!” He snapped coldly. His frustration, finally being the emotion that won over. As soon as it happened, he felt bad, but surprisingly enough Levy didn’t seem to take any special offense to his harsh attitude towards her. She instead, only sent him one last worried glance from over her shoulder. Her breathing was coming out in small white puffs of air from the cold, before she finally turned away from him again, to do as he said.

Damn her... Gajeel’s mind was raging, as his one eye stayed planted over her back. He had never been so conflicted about anything in his whole entire life. Everything she seemed to do was just
killing him now. All because he now understood that he loved her… And yet… He also knew, that he was the worst thing for her. How was he supposed to live with that? It was so agonizing to even look at her, let alone deal with her concerns for him. He just couldn’t.

Why did you have to be the one to find me Levy…? His mind was questioning, as he continued to watch her walk in front of him. I was so happy to see you again, I think I woulda been okay with just dying right then and there, on the ground... At least then, I wouldn’t have to be dealing with this… I am an idiot, for jus’ figurin’ this all out now… He thought, his mind was going back to the way she had wrapped her arms around him at the hospital. He slammed his eyes shut again, he didn’t want to think about it anymore, but it was haunting him and his heart just wouldn’t stop aching over it.

Moving was still so hard, especially in the cold. His poor body was hurting so much. Not that pain was something new to him by any means, but again this wasn’t quite the same. The feelings he was now shouldering on top of his injuries, doing their part to wear him down even faster.

The pain of loving someone… Dad, you were right… His eyes had opened back up and he couldn’t help, but smirk bitterly, as he looked over Levy’s tiny frame once more. I fucking hate you, for always bein’ right, old man... You, asshole… Yer always just laughing at me, aren’t you? From somewhere in hell, I’m sure… Gajeel staggered forwards at the thought.

Moving was still so hard, especially in the cold. His poor body was hurting so much. Not that pain was something new to him by any means, but again this wasn’t quite the same. The feelings he was now shouldering on top of his injuries, doing their part to wear him down even faster.

He was taking a wobbly step, his one foot beginning to slide forwards some upon landing. The soft snow below his feet was turning into slush upon contact with his large and heavy boots. He had to stiffen up his knees in order to keep from falling on his bad leg. The pain in his thigh was howling at him from the sudden and stiff movement. His teeth were clamping down and his head was going up. He was clenching his jaw tightly, waiting for the wave of pain to pass, in one seething breath. Once it was finally over, it gave him a chance to look around and reassess where the two of them had ended up. Their surroundings suddenly seeming very familiar to him, despite the late hour of night and terrible weather.

Gajeel stood up straight again. His stomach had started to growl, relentlessly. A reminder of how long it had been since he had eaten. He was looking to the building they were walking beside. There was the scent of food in the air and a familiar shop window, that he could not tear his eyes away from.

He was looking inside. The lights were on, people were inside. Most of them workers, but he could also spot at least one customer. A true sign that the diner appeared to be open. His eye was taking a special interest in one of the booth seats, that he could see from the window. The ache of all of his injuries, were calling for him to take a rest in that welcoming, empty spot and he knew right then, that he just couldn’t pass it up. He was far too tired to keep going anyways.

“Levy…” Gajeel finally called after her. She paused and then turned around, giving him back her full attention. “Back here…” He said, standing near the door of the building they had just been passing by, the very same he had been inspecting. Levy came walking up towards him slowly, her curiosity clearly showing as she came near.

“What is it?” She asked.

“Let’s go in here…” Gajeel nodded towards the door, of the little twenty-four-hour diner, they had been standing outside of. Levy glanced at the windows of the building in confusion, before looking back up at him in question.

“But Gajeel, it’s probably five in the morning at this point…” Levy explained, her worry showing again. “You need to get some proper rest…"
“Levy I haven’t eaten in over a day.” Gajeel stated flatly, making Levy’s eyes widen in disbelief.

“What? Why…!?” She asked him, completely startled by this news. If circumstances had been different, Gajeel would have taken the time to laugh at her, but right now, he was just too tired and in too much pain from his damn shoulder and leg.

“Just… C’mon.” He huffed, reaching for the door with the arm that wasn’t in a sling. Levy was immediately trotting up without a word. She was quick to grab the door and open it for him.

Once the two of them were inside, Gajeel looked around the familiar, brightly lit space. It seemed to be abandoned by mostly everyone with the exception of a few workers, and one old man who was sipping coffee at the bar. Gajeel was pleased with this, happy for the peace this time around, as this was the very same diner he had just visited with Juvia, not even two full days before.

He glanced down at Levy, who was standing just beside him. His thoughts were recalling the conversation he had, had with Juvia that day, concerning her. Juvia had told him then, how worried Levy had been for him and at the time, he hadn’t been sure how that made him feel. The frustrations he seemed to be dealing with, were returning to him once again, this time at his own stupidity. It wasn’t going to matter how he felt about Levy, if he was going to need to stay away from her, anyways.

“Hello!” Came a familiar cheerful voice pulling Gajeel from his thoughts. He glanced up, only to be met with the very same young waitress who had served Juvia and him the last time they had been in there, Meredy. “Oh hey!” She greeted again, upon recognition of Gajeel’s face. “I know you.” She added lightly, a smile spreading over her lips, as she closed her eyes happily. Gajeel’s eyes widened in slight surprise at seeing her there again. He hadn’t thought it was likely that she would even be working this early in the morning, when he had seen her working the evening shift, the other day. Levy couldn’t help, but look from the girl, to Gajeel a couple of times, before Meredy continued, “You’re Juvia’s friend from the other day, am I right?” She asked, taking in his appearance once again, with some slight confusion. “Although… I seem to recall you having better days…” She added with some slight concern, her eyes noticing the sling and gesturing towards it. “What the heck happened?” She asked at long last.

“Nothin’…” Gajeel replied gruffly, not wishing to deal with her in the slightest. The last thing he had wanted, was to be recognized by anybody tonight. “And why the hell are you here so early, anyways?” He then asked and that was the moment when Levy finally chose to speak up, seeing as Gajeel was being incredibly rude to the kind girl.

“Gajeel!” Levy scolded, “She works here…” Levy then muttered in exasperation.

“Yea I know that.” He stated arrogantly. “But I just saw her working in the evening the other day!” He added, completely annoyed.

“Oh no…” Meredy finally chimed in, her hand going out and waving at them modestly. “It’s okay! I pick up a lot of shifts, including the graveyard ones… Just trying to get through school and survive, ya know…” She added with a laugh.

“Huh…” Gajeel stated, looking to Levy. “Sounds familiar…” He couldn’t help, but smirk just a little bit, even with his pain as Levy sent him a pointed glare in return.

“Yea, no worries.” Meredy spoke, a smile coming over her face. “Now did you guys want to take a seat? I’ll be serving you.”

Gajeel didn’t even bother to answer the poor girl, instead he just started staggering towards the booth
he had been able to spot from the window. Meredy and Levy stood there, watching him in pause, an awkward silence falling over the two of them by the display. It was painful to watch Gajeel shuffle his way to the booth, Meredy finally had to tear her eyes away from him, in fear that she wouldn’t be caught staring. She then stole a glance at the smaller girl who was standing right beside her, taking in Levy’s appearance with question. Assuming that she may have very well been Gajeel’s girlfriend… Which if true, was surprising to say the least.

“Is he going to be okay…?” She finally whispered to Levy, who appeared to still be watching Gajeel, with clear worry etched into her features. Levy did a small double take at the waitress, before finally answering her question.

“Oh… Uh yea…” She finally replied in clear alarm. Her eyes once again glued to Gajeel, as he clumsily plopped down into the booth seat, he had been admiring from the window. “He will be now, at least. But he does still need to take it easy… If only he would listen to me…” Levy spoke, off handedly. Her eyelids were lowering and a small breath was escaping her as she said this.

Meredy was watching her with some renewed interest, potentially ready to ask a few more questions. Namely, how Gajeel had gotten so injured, but the pair was rudely interrupted, before she could.

“Oh’ you two comin’ over here, er what?!” He hollered from his spot, causing Meredy to jump and Levy to just scowl at him. Meredy was ready with her apology to the impatient customer, but this time it was Levy who didn’t give her the chance to speak.

“Gosh, even when you are hurt this badly, you are still intolerable! I swear!” Levy snapped. Marching over to him, from where she was standing by Meredy, with both fists clenched down at her sides. Meredy could only watch, her mouth agape, as the small, but very angry girl who appeared to be accompanying Gajeel, sat down in the seat across from him, still yelling. “Stop being so rude!”

“I haven’t eaten in two days’ woman!” Gajeel countered back.

“Oh please…” Levy was replying, her arms folding. “I’m really having a hard time believing that one.” Meredy was watching them in disbelief, as they argued back and forth.

They have to be a couple, right…? She was questioning. From the way they were fighting, it seemed like they had been together forever. Her eyes eased on the pair and a sweet smile crossed her lips. Wow… There must really be someone out there for everyone… If even that rude guy, could find a girlfriend... And it was with that thought, that Meredy finally braved her way over to them. Her presence at the end of their table, finally getting Levy’s attention, once she had cleared her throat to stop their bickering.

“So…” Meredy spoke up, once the pair had quieted down, a large smile on her face. Levy appeared to be giving her, her full attention, whereas Gajeel seemed to be ignoring her completely, as he just stared at Levy instead. “Did you guys know what you want to drink?”

“Water and a steak burger.” Gajeel stated flatly, earning a glare from Levy, from across the table. “And get it out here fast… Will ya?” And this time Gajeel smirked at Levy, as she just rolled her eyes at him.

“Oh, yea sure! No problem!” Meredy chimed happily, while writing the order down and then she looked to Levy, who had just torn her eyes away from Gajeel. “And for you…?” She asked politely.

“Oh… I just want a water. I won’t be eating anything.” Levy answered kindly, but Gajeel’s smirk had disappeared at her response.
“Whaddya mean ya won’t be gettin’ anything… Eat.” He demanded, earning Levy’s eyes back on him.

“Gajeel stop… I’m fine.” Levy replied, with a small sigh. Gajeel then looked up to Meredy with a low brow.

“No, she’s gettin’ somethin.” He told Meredy. “And I’m payin’. Levy again let out a breath of exasperation. “Just order.” He then pointed to the menu on the table with a glare back at Levy.

“Fine! Just… Stop being so pushy…” Levy muttered, her eyes going down as she began to open the menu. Gajeel smirked, so clearly proud of himself, that even Meredy had to stifle a laugh at him.

After a few minutes of looking through the menu, and some help deciding from Meredy, Levy finally chose to go with an order of pancakes. Meredy then left with their orders, only to return a few minutes later with their drinks. She set them down on the table, the silence now noticeable as Levy and Gajeel had not only ceased all arguing but speaking, as well. Levy softly said her thanks to waitress, in which Meredy smiled kindly to in return, before finally departing from their table once again.

Levy was watching the pretty, young waitress leave. Her face a mixture of confusion and thoughtfulness, before she finally turned her head back to look at Gajeel, in question.

“So…” She began cautiously. “You know that girl?” She then asked and Gajeel just let his eyes wonder the room, mindlessly.

“Barely…” He answered plainly. His face seemingly impatient, as he appeared to be very uncomfortable in his spot. His shoulders were moving, his sling very clearly getting in the way, with the table right in front of him.

“Oh yea?” Levy then asked. “Well, from my understanding, that could very well mean that you two hooked up at some point.” She added, her one eyebrow rising, as Gajeel finally glanced up, his attention back on her now.

“Hooked up?” Gajeel questioned, he couldn’t help, but smirk just a little bit at Levy’s phrasing. “Gi Hi… Nah shrimp…” He laughed. “She’s just some friend of the rain woman, that’s all… I just met her the other day when I came in here.” He explained casually.

“Rain woman?” Levy questioned with confusion.

“Juvia…” Gajeel clarified.

“Oh. That woman you sent to my apartment?” Levy said and Gajeel nodded. His face appeared to be a bit under stress though, the pain of his shoulder was still bothering him.

“Yea…” He choked out, between clenched teeth. Levy was watching him and he could see the worry flashing over her face and so, he chose to keep talking. “She’s an old friend of mine…” He managed to get out.

“Yea… That was what she said.” Levy replied, a small smile appearing over her face. “It’s actually kind of funny, when she first showed up asking about you… I kind of thought she might be your girlfriend or wife or something…” Levy spoke, laughing just a bit to herself, over the crazy idea that Gajeel of all people, would have a wife.
“Oh, hell no…” He answered flatly. “She may be my friend and all, but she’s also a loon.” He added bluntly.

“And you are a womanizer… So why wouldn’t I think that, the first girl showing up to my apartment, speaking your name would be some kind of crazy ex-lover, or revenge fueled wife, huh?” Levy added, a tiny smirk of her own, forming.

“Jeeze… I sleep with one roommate of yours, one time and you think that I’ve been with every girl in town… What’s with that?” Gajeel asked a bit flabbergasted and Levy couldn’t help but think of Cana, and everything she had said about him. And although she had been joking and teasing him, in truth she could feel the jealousy was indeed actually there.

“So, is the waitress not pretty to you then?” She suddenly asked, making Gajeel just look at her strangely, as if he didn’t know what to say.

“I honestly didn’t really think much bout her, to tell ya the truth…” He answered honestly, scratching his cheek. “Guess in some ways she kinda reminds me of you ‘cause she seems to be workin’ all the damn time…” He dropped his gaze as he continued. “And she is a waitress in school and all… And she seems nice and stuff… But…” His words were drifting, like he didn’t know what more to say. His eyes had gone up, but then they were coming back down to land on Levy. The gaze she appeared to be sending him was a bit apprehensive, as she waited for him to continue.

Now that Gajeel was actually giving it some thought, he realized that yes, he did find Meredy attractive. She was just one of those girls that anyone could look at, and think was pretty. And although, she had a lot of similarities to Levy, as he had just mentioned. He also realized that there was still something just so **uninteresting** about her, to him, quite unlike Levy. And that was why he had never even bothered to show an ounce of interest in her, nor bothered with the formalities of being polite, because he just hadn’t cared.

He was staring at Levy’s face, as he thought about this. Taking in her features, thinking about all of the times they had interacted with one another and how much he had always enjoyed their banter. How attractive and clever he thought she was. How amazing their one night had been together… Just how much he enjoyed her, period.

Nobody could match that… Nobody could be Levy. She was just… Everything to him. And now that he had figured that out, he was going to have to figure out how he was supposed to be without her.

Gajeel’s head went down, his eyes landing on the table. Levy tilted her head in question, as she watched his whole demeanor suddenly change, right before her eyes.

“Gajeel…?” He could hear the worry there, in her voice.

“S’okay Levy…” He reassured her, his voice soft. Her head bent down, her body bending far over the table, so she could inspect him and keep her voice quiet.

“Is it your shoulder?” She asked, her eyes wide with fear. Gajeel glanced up, matching Levy’s stare and then he could feel the heat. Heat in his face and his ears. Warmth from his neck was flooding up, making his eyes start to gloss over and his heart twist with deep pain.

“Yea…” He answered gently, glancing away. “That’s it.” He added softly.

Finally, after a few seconds, Levy had decided to sit back down, properly in her seat, still looking to
Gajeel with some uncertainty. A suspicious feeling was coming over, that he may have just lied to her, for perhaps the first time ever. She didn’t know what to say though, because she had no proof. It had just been a fleeting feeling she had, had and so she decided just forgo the matter entirely, and forget about it.

Silence finally reigned on between the two of them, as they began to wait among the quiet, for their food. The mood having changed quite a bit, for reasons Levy still didn’t quite understand, but she was choosing to use that time to study Gajeel, as he sat across from her in the booth. His eyes were down and he looked very tired, and that was why she had chosen not to speak to him anymore. Figuring he could benefit from the peace for a little while, while in his terrible condition.

Ya know what… This is kind of like your first date with him. A voice in the back of Levy’s mind suddenly spoke up, from out of the blue. This made Levy lower her eyes away from Gajeel, as her hands began to fiddle together nervously with confusion.

Oh please… Gajeel and I, on an actual date? Now that is just… Weird. She thought, her mind pondering the subject a bit further, remembering a time where he had kind of asked her out before. But still… If it ever did happen… Is this, what it would be like…? Her mind was truthfully questioning that, up until the moment she glanced back up at him, because once she did, she realized pretty quickly that he was actually fast asleep.

“Oh, Gajeel…” She muttered upon seeing him there, sitting up in the booth, with sling and all. Eyes closed gently and soft breathing sounds escaping him, as his body heaved heavily with each one.

“You idiot…” She added gently. Her expression was easing into a tiny smile as she watched him, though her eyes still showed their worry as well.

“I am going to ask you this once again…” Came the fearsomely seething, voice of one Erza Scarlet, as she glared down into the beady eyes of a very sick and hungover, Banaboster Goodrich. Who was sitting down in a chair, behind a table, in the interrogation room of Magnolia’s police station. “And I better get the truth…” Erza added. Her voice, though quiet for the moment, was still commanding and astoundingly adamant. Banaboster was looking to her with a pleading expression, as he held an ice pack over the one side of his head.

“Pleaseee….” He was begging. “No more shouting… I am the victim, remember?” He had begun to plead to the scarlet haired captain, but she was having none of it. As her fist came slamming down onto the table in front of him so hard, that it actually caused the whole object to jump up and off of the ground a little, only to land with a terrible clanking sound.

“Enough!” She was shouting, as she did this. Both noises causing Banaboster to cover his ears and moan in pain. “Who the hell, was the man who tried to murder you tonight!? Who was the one who threw a plastic bag over your head and tried to suffocate you! Tell me the truth!” She demanded fiercely. Her eyes wide with extreme anger as Banaboster was basically crying at her in mercy, from the pounding pains in his head.

“I already told ya, crazy lady!” He was hollering out in pain, tears going down his face. “It was Jellal Fernandez!!” Erza froze up at the name. Her eye was twitching as she watched him, her body was leaning forwards, still over the table and her fist was trembling. She was beginning to take a step back, her body stiffening. She was so incredibly tense.

“You…” She uttered in a breathless voice. “You sick… Twisted… Little coward…” She was just barely getting the words out, she was so angry, as she shook her head and her teeth came crashing down. “You are LYING!” She was screaming suddenly, her body going forwards.

“Captain Erza! Stop!” A booming voice was suddenly bellowing. It’s power reverberating off of the
walls of the tiny room. Banaboster was ducking underneath the table, his hands clamped over his ears. His life basically having, just flashed before his eyes, as Erza had nearly jumped him, but thankfully she had stopped with the presence of another human being who had summoned all reason back into her. She froze, turning around to see Elfman, there in the doorway of the interrogation room. He was looking at her with a low brow, his expression a scowl and yet she knew he could understand. “This isn’t working…” He stated bluntly. “Let’s try something else…” He suggested calmly.

Erza’s body, though still shaking with rage, finally did turn away from Banaboster, who was now getting up and off of the ground. Elfman held the door for Erza as she marched out, a tense ball of anger. Once the door was shut behind them, he began to speak again.

“What were you thinking in there? You almost just violated that man’s rights, just now?!” He asked in clear distress. Pointing a large finger to the big window that was the interrogation room. Now normally, Elfman would never have the balls to say something like this to Erza, but this instance was different. He knew she was acting on pure emotion.

“I just… I know he is lying.” She stated softly, with her back still turned away from him, so he could not see how upset she actually felt. She wanted to cry, her fist was shaking. She was so worried about Jellal. She hadn’t any idea where he was, or if he was even alive and yet here they were, Jose, Aria and Banaboster pinning this whole thing, on him. Banaboster, the man she knew was probably alive, only because of Jellal’s involvement in the first place.

“We all know he’s lying…” Elfman spoke, his voice gentle. “But we can’t lose our heads over it… These guys are the bad guys, and that’s what bad guys do…” Erza heard the words and immediately knew he was right. She needed to obey them, she needed to take hold of them and make them true and so… She would.

Her fist clenched hard, and her head came up proudly. She quickly stifled her emotions and then turned back around to face her underling, with new found strength.

“You are right. Elfman…” She spoke deeply, a small smile then appearing over her face in appreciation. “Thank you.” Elfman just smiled in return.

“That’s what a real man’s for.” He stated with a thumbs up. Erza’s smile disappeared, as she looked up at him, the moment passing.

“Do you have anything back from the lab yet?” She asked, getting straight to the point again. This question earning her a frown once more.

“Yea… Actually…” He stated. “But that was why I needed you to calm down, because I have a lot more bad news to report…” Erza looked to him, her expression stoic, but she could feel it. The worry was there within her and she was just pushing it further inside, shelling it all in armor, just as a way to keep it at bay.

“What is it?” She asked, her voice holding strong, despite the aching feeling in her gut.

“The blood at the scene and on Aria’s gun…” Elfman spoke. “It did, belong to Jellal Fernandez.” There is was. That pain. That terrible slicing pain, but there wasn’t time for it… No, she needed to choke it back and so she did.

“And… About the gun…?” She then asked, her voice did waver just ever so slightly.

“Turns out, Aria does own it, legally…” Elfman stated. “He has a concealed and carry license for it.”
And it was finally this bit of information, that caused Erza to turn around abruptly.

“Of course, he does…” She stated coldly, the realization of what they were now up against, finally becoming clear.

With this new evidence emerging, there would be no way for them to hold Aria on any of the charges, they had managed to stack up against him. Instead, Jellal was to be blamed for them, in an attempted murder charge that he did not even commit. With Aria coming across as the good guy, who happened to be there, to save Banaboster’s life at the time of the crime.

Jellal… Came Erza’s thoughts, remembering the fairy made from blood on the wall. Blood she now knew for sure, belonged to Jellal. Please… Stay alive...

They had called a cab this time, with Meredy’s help of course, because Levy wasn’t about to endure another second of watching Gajeel tromp through the snow, in his horribly weak and injured state. She just couldn’t deal with that anymore. Especially if he was going to be so particularly stubborn about it and not let her, even help him.

Once they had gotten into the car, Levy had asked Gajeel what his home address was, but he had refused to answer. Luckily, she knew the street he lived on and what the building looked like, but Gajeel wouldn’t even give her a chance to explain it, to the driver. He had just instructed the driver to take them to Levy’s own apartment, instead. Seemingly knowing, and remembering the address just fine, to Levy’s own surprise.

He then explained to her, that it was just his way of making sure she got home safe. Which was hard to argue with, seeing as she had initially found it endearing at first, but the more she thought about it on the car ride there. The more unsure Levy was becoming, about Gajeel’s reasons for wanting to make sure she was home before him. Was this maybe just his way of trying to get rid of her? Once this thought took over, she couldn’t stop wondering if she was indeed right.

Levy was peering out the window of the car, for most of the way there. Her gaze just blankly staring out into nothing, as the sun finally rose up and over the city. Her head was a mixture of questions and emotions, that she couldn’t quite make heads or tails of, all swirling together within the huge melting pot, that was her being. She had no idea where to go from here with Gajeel, nor did she know if he even really cared, to begin with.

Finally, they had arrived in front of her building and the car was coming to a stop just along the curb. Levy could feel her stomach beginning to drop, once the car had come to a complete halt. The moment for her to get out and let this all be over. She felt the shift of the driver, putting the car into park and then her face began to pale. She could feel the life and color, beginning to drain from her face, as she knew it was time to say goodbye to him.

I can’t… She thought, not having the courage to turn around and face him. Hell, she couldn’t even bring herself to look at him, it was just too sickening. Instead all she could do was reach a shivering hand up to the door handle of the cab and begin to open it.

Just as she was shifting her small body out of the car, she heard the sound of the other car door opening. Levy stood up on her feet and then glanced up, just in time to see Gajeel half-hazardly, lifting his body from the seat of the cab. His torso reining over high, above the roof of the car, as his eye was still looking to the driver through the open window of the cab.
“Wait here, alright?” He was telling the driver, who was nodding to him and giving him the thumbs up, in understanding.

Levy’s feet were basically numb, as she looked up at him with slight panic. So, he was getting out of the car… To do what? To say goodbye? She could feel relief and terror at the same time. She didn’t know how she was feeling about this, a complete mess of contradicting emotions, that were pulling at her so hard, that she knew she was shivering from them and not from the cold. Gajeel was looking to her. A wide smirk spreading right across his exhausted face and Levy felt such a jump in her chest, that she needed to plant her feet, in order to keep from slipping in the snow.

“C’mon shrimp!” He was saying, his voice light and almost happy, despite his pain. And then he started walking around to the other side of the car, carefully towards her, sling and all. Levy stood there, staring up at him at a complete stand still, unable to comprehend what it was, that they were doing. That was until Gajeel came up beside her and offered her his good hand. A smile still painted over his face, as he looked down at her.

What…? What is he doing? Levy questioned, looking up at his him, with complete bewilderment. She hadn’t any idea what to do, other than to stare at the offered hand for a few seconds. Then finally after a moment, it registered, ‘oh he wants me to take his hand’. Once she realized this, she finally laid her tiny shaking fingers into his palm and was enveloped by his hand’s warmth. Pulling her gently behind him, over the sidewalk and towards the first door of her apartment building. Once there, Gajeel finally stopped and turned around to face Levy. His hand freeing hers again.

“This is it…” He stated gently. His smile still intact, but Levy was noticing his voice sounded strangely weak and his eyes seemed to hold a hint of sadness to them. “Time ta say goodbye…” He added softly, his smile weakening.

Really? Levy was asking herself as she looked him over carefully, taking in the memory of his face, as quickly as she could. Almost as she was trying to get all of the details of it down, so she could remember him properly. This really is it… The end of it… Levy’s thoughts continued. Her mind was thinking back to earlier in the night, to the moment she had kissed him at the hospital. Her mind recalling how amazingly relieved she had been, to see him again, in much more stable condition, after everything he had gone through. She hadn’t been able to stifle the feeling then. She had just been so happy. Her eyes were moving down from his face, as she remembered it truly.

“Yea…” Gajeel stated, breaking through Levy’s thoughts. Almost as if he had been answering her internal questions, but really, he was saying it more for himself. “For real this time.” He added, earning Levy’s eyes back on him. His smile was now completely gone. “Levy I… I don’t want you to get hurt.” He explained, his voice clear and slow. “So that’s why… That’s why I’m gonna stay away…”

Stay away… Levy repeated those words, in her mind. How many times had she heard them, in the last twenty-four hours? How many times had she been warned, or told to have nothing to do with Gajeel? How many people had tried to explain to her, how bad Gajeel was for her? It was like those words were just following her around, trying to dictate her life, in the way that they deemed worthy for her, but…

“It is my choice…” She spoke quietly, remembering her dream with sudden realization.

“What…?” Gajeel then asked with confusion, not quite hearing what it was she had said, as she had been looking down. Levy looked back up to him, her heart pounding as she realized what it was, that she wanted.

“Gajeel…” She spoke gently, he was looking at her, his expression a bit lost. He hadn’t any idea
what was going on in her head. “This… This might not be the right choice… But…” She was looking up at him, her eyes shining with tears, “I am tired… Tired of doing what everyone thinks I should… Tired of being afraid…” She was stepping closer to him and he looked to her with a raised brow, not understanding what she meant.

“I don’t get it…” He spoke. “What is it, yer tryin’ ta say?” He then asked and this made Levy suddenly smile at him so beautifully, that Gajeel couldn’t even think.

“I want you to stay…” She was answering him and then she was grabbing the edge of his coat by the collar and pulling him down towards her. Gently easing her lips against his, just like in the hospital.

Levy’s heart was beginning to swell with happiness, as Gajeel began to return her kiss, with equally as much power. His good arm was wrapping around her back and securing her in the best embrace, that he could manage while still wearing a sling. The two of them were swaying into each other’s slight movements. Hanging on deeply with need, a certain understanding finally having been reached, as they were perfectly in sync with one another. Pulling apart and looking at one another longingly, foreheads together as they each began to breathe in rhythm. True harmony achieved.

“Levy…” Gajeel was staring to see it, but Levy was pulling away from him enough to look up and see him properly.

“Just for tonight, Gajeel… Stay here…” She spoke, her hand going up and resting over his cheek softly. “You are too tired, to go home… So just stay here with me…” She offered gently, her fingers running over his skin and then she was slowly reaching up to the side, where he wasn’t wearing his sling and kissing him once, on the side of the neck. “I will take care of you… I promise…”

Gajeel was standing there, his feet planted. His breathing heavy and his mind trying to understand how any of this was real. There was no way this was Levy, saying these things to him. Doing these things to him… He just couldn’t understand that and what was even worse was, that he couldn’t even deny her. Any chance he had ever had of winning against her and his own selfish desires, was now completely gone the moment he had realized how he felt.

Gajeel’s head lowered and he nodded, not being able to spare her a single word. This of course, earned him another lovely smile, in which she answered him with a, “Good, I’m glad!” in her cheerful sweet voice and now he was the one kissing her, making her smile against him.

Maybe this isn’t the right choice… Levy was thinking as Gajeel’s lips pressed against hers, moving and parting… but just this once… I would like to go after something I want…

They pulled apart once again. Levy was laughing lightly and Gajeel was just silent, completely lost in her, for the moment.

No matter what the risks may be…. They are worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Some people tell me, that you’re not my kind
And I believe them, but I can’t get you off of my mind
Some people tell me that I should stay away
Maybe I will… some other day

‘Cause it feels right
Ya know it feels good
And I don’t always do what I should
And I know what makes me happy
And in my heart you are it exactly

I don’t wanna do right, I just want you tonight
Not just only in my dreams
Save my best behavior, for a little later
‘Cause I’m only 17
Think I made my mind up, I got time to grow up
Face responsibility
Livin’ in the moment, keepin’ my heart open
While I’m only 17
I learn my lessons, and I’ll make mistakes
And if I get burned, it will be my heart to break
It isn’t easy, hearing what they say
Sometimes you’ve got to take a leap of faith

‘Cause it feels right
Ya know it feels good
And I don’t always do what I should
And I know what makes me happy
And in my heart you are it exactly

I don’t wanna do right, I just want you tonight
Not just only in my dreams
Save my best behavior, for a little later
‘Cause I’m only 17
Think I made my mind up, I got time to grow up
Face responsibility
Livin’ in the moment, keepin’ my heart open
While I’m only 17

Anyone, who’s ever been in love
Has got to know
What it means to have a dream
And no one can say anything
To change my mind, no, not this time

I don’t wanna do right, I just want you tonight
Not just only in my dreams
Save my best behavior, for a little later
‘Cause I’m only 17
Think I made my mind up, I got time to grow up
Face responsibility
Livin’ in the moment, keepin’ my heart open
While I’m only 17

“17” By Mandy Moore
Stakes

Chapter Summary

Gray is awoken by a very noisy roommate, but being awake that early allows him to catch some important information on the news. Gajeel and Levy wake up and discuss if they wish to be a presence in each others lives or not. Gray catches Erza in a vulnerable state and runs an idea by her. Natsu manages to get Lucy to open up to him, but not about the problem that is really bothering her. Makarov has some bad news to deliver. Gajeel finally gets some help from a friendly face. Erza's world is falling apart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 15: Stakes

Gray was sleeping belly down with his face buried into a pillow, doing well to drown out the noise of high noon. His subconscious was in the midst of a paralyzing dream, one that was more like a recollection of something despairing. The last image he could recall of her face, the young detective who had helped him all of those years ago. Her sympathetic, dark eyes and hauntingly beautiful smile were forever appearing within the confines of his resting head.

Rays of sunlight were stretching in through a crack between a set of navy-blue drapes, hanging over the window. The glow bringing life and color back into the tiny dark space, that had become Gray’s bedroom. The floor was made up of wood with a large tan area rug that was easy to miss, as it was littered with piles upon piles of dirty clothes, just spilling out from the closet. There was a small desk in one corner covered in papers, crushed cans and half empty bottles of water. The dresser positioned right beside the desk, wasn’t in much better condition, as nearly every drawer was hanging open to some degree. Carelessly shoved so full of shirts and pants, that they were basically spilling out and onto the floor. Showcasing that this was clearly a room occupied by someone who had little appreciation for wardrobe, or clothes in any capacity.

The bed had also become home to some of these loose articles of clothing. Which worked out well, because there didn’t appear to be any sheets. They had instead been pulled off of the mattress and
ball up to one side of the bed, opposite of where Gray’s limp body was lying. His arms were
stretched up and hugging the same pillow that his head was resting on. His brow was pushed
together in distress, as he began to mumble the name of the face, he had been seeing in his sleep.

“Ur…” He began, but a loud sound was breaking through his subconscious, finally managing to
disturb the deep rest he had been stuck in. It had been the sound of someone in particular, shouting.
A voice Gray could recognize and who’s image was starting to take form in his dream. “Lyon…?”
He was now beginning to question as his one eyebrow was lowering with annoyance.

“COME ON! WHAT IS THIS?! A JOKE?!” Came the voice once more and this time, it was too
loud for even Gray to ignore it. His eyes began to flutter open, a moan immediately making its way
out of his mouth, as he shakily lifted up his chin from the pillow. He was stealing an annoyed glare,
at the alarm clock on his bedside table. The time read about a quarter after twelve and Gray could not
help, but let out a growl of irritation. He began to push his tired body up, no longer capable of
sleeping through the noisy shouts of his roommate in the next room.

Lyon was standing just feet away from a large, but outdated television. A gray, corded controller in
his one hand, and his fist up at the T.V. in great annoyance. An old-school video game screen was
flashing up, on the bulbous television screen. Taunting him with retro music and poor sound quality,
as it read the words ‘Game Over’ on it. Lyon was shaking his head with teeth clamped down in
frustration, as he stared at it.

“This is nonsense!” He was shouting. “Shame me, all you want game, but I will not be stopped so
easily! I swear… With all of my power, I will beat you!”

“EY!” Came another loud voice. Interrupting Lyon’s long-winded speech to the television set, as
Gray had appeared. After swinging his bedroom door open, like a sledgehammer coming down,
allowing it crash into the wall behind it. “What the hell is wrong with you?! I’m tryin’ to sleep!”
Lyon stood up straight, his eyes taking in his roommate’s less than modest appearance, as Gray
didn’t appear to be wearing anything at the moment.

"Put some damn clothes on.” Lyon demanded simply, while turning his head back away to face the
television set again. He took up the controller in both hands, and hit a button to start the game back
up, once more. “I mean… Come on… I don’t need to see that…” He muttered quietly under his
breath, disgust evident in his tone.

Now normally, Gray would have been a bit more embarrassed for the slip up, but today he was far
too annoyed with his roommate to be anything else, but angry. He responded by turning back around
and slamming his bedroom door shut so hard, that the whole house rattled in his wake. Once Gray
had at least put on a pair of boxer shorts, he was turning back around to head out into the living
room, of their tiny little flat house. Lyon had settled for sitting down on the plaid ottoman, of their
clearly old and very used sofa.

He was a young man of basically average height and a relatively similar physique to Gray’s, with
perhaps, just a little less meat on his bones. His features were clean, his nose was pointed, but not
overly large. His jawline was also pointed, but his cheeks were full and prominent. His brow line
was smooth and angled somewhat diagonally, with the direction of his eyes. His actual eyebrows
were thin and a bit high placed over his forehead. His hair was shaped like swooping wings, piled
high and landing heavily over to one side of his face. The color, a rare silver with a slight tint of blue.
He was wearing basic day-off house garb, black and gray patterned pajama pants and a blue T-shirt
that read ‘Bow to your Sub-Zero Emperor’ in white lettering.
Gray came marching back into the room, fists clenched, but Lyon was paying him no mind. His attention was still unflinchingly focused in on the television set before him, as he continued to press buttons on the controller.

“What the hell is your problem?!” Gray snapped, standing just off to the side of where Lyon was sitting.

“And you consider just wearing your underwear, as being dressed?” Lyon retorted flatly without even bothering to spare Gray, so much as a sideways glance.

“I shouldn’t have to be dressed yet! It’s my day off!” Gray was shouting back, pointing to his bedroom doorway. “Hell, I should still be in there! SLEEPING! It’s only noon! I work nights!” Gray was exclaiming, his hands open in outrage.

“No need to shout Gray…” Lyon replied in a taunting voice, again completely blowing off Gray’s anger. “I get it. You sleep all day.” Gray was staring at his roommate with his hands out like he might strangle him.

“You were the one shouting! That’s why I am awake right now!” Gray hollered into Lyon’s ear, making Lyon lean away from him, but it was just as this was happening that the retro music started playing once more and the ‘game over’ image, flashed up on the screen once again.

“No… Not again!” Lyon yelled standing up, as Gray stood there watching him. “I’m on the last level! But this damn boss is impossible!” Gray looked to the T.V. and then back to Lyon.

“Ohhh, so you finally made it to Deloria huh? You gotta use the Iced Shell move to beat him.” Gray explained.

“No way! You’re out of your mind! I can beat him myself, without resorting to a suicide move!” Lyon snapped, as Gray just shrugged and turned away to plop down onto the couch Lyon was sitting in front of, with legs outstretched and arms back.

“Why do you think they put it in the game, stupid? So, you could use it on the last boss… But hey, if you think you got it… Let’s see it, then! Come on, tough guy!” Gray spoke gesturing towards the T.V. “Go on… Start the game.” Lyon was staring at Gray with a look of uncertainty. There was brief pause as they gave one another a stare down and then Lyon finally turned away.

“No way. Not with you here. You’re just going to distract me.” Lyon replied at long last, as he stepped up towards the console, turned it off and ejected the Galuna Island cartridge out from the top. Gray was standing back up, with a smile and a shake of his head, as he padded his way towards the tiny kitchen, through a small open doorway.

“Fine, then turn the T.V. on or something.” He was saying, just as Lyon was already doing that with the remote.

“Yea… Two steps ahead of you… as usual.” He mumbled arrogantly to himself as the screen flashed blue a couple of times, before actual television picture was finally appearing on it. Lyon was clicking his way through the channels, watching the large numbers in the corner change. He could hear the noise of Gray making himself something to eat, until suddenly something on the screen caught his attention. It was enough for him to even back up a few channel numbers, to take a second look at whatever it was, he had seen. It appeared to be some kind of breaking news story, as there were multiple lines of text scrolling across the bottom of the screen. “Wait is that…?” Lyon was squinting his eyes, as the picture was currently showing a faraway shot of a man surrounded by cameras in front of the Justice Center.
“A single gunshot rang out, late last night, just outside the Twilight Ogre Casino…” The news reporter was speaking, explaining the story, saying the name Lyon was waiting to hear. “And now we are about to bring you live footage of Jose Porla, addressing these claims… And the charges brought up against-”

“Gray! Get the hell in here! Jose is on T.V.!” Lyon yelled, his eyes widening, as it was dawning on him, what the reporter was talking about. “Sounds like the police are accusing him of something!”

“What?!” Lyon could hear Gray exclaiming from the kitchen. Then came the sound of something dropping, followed by feet, as Gray basically flew into the room. His eyes were wide and staring at the T.V. in disbelief, just as Jose’s smug face appeared, right across it smirking.

“What bias, my partner was stabbed and therefore acted in the defense of his own life! Normally the Phantom Organization supports the actions and choices that drive Magnolia’s police force, but it has been brought to our attention that, there may be certain biases at play here… Those biases, being the reasons why, my injured partner was arrested in the first place… These prejudices should not be getting in the way of true law enforcement! That is intolerable! Evidence is all we need be concerning ourselves with, when it comes to the crimes made in our city! And in this case, all signs point to wanted fugitive, Jellal Fernandez as the attempted murder…! How he has somehow managed to evade police custody for nearly three years now, is beyond me! But he is apparently still roaming around our fair city, causing problems and putting people’s lives in danger! It is time Magnolia’s police, refocus their energy and start actually protecting our citizens from the real dangers in this city, instead of making falsified arrests based on bigotry!”

Finally, at long last Jose had stopped speaking, as all of the reporters around him had started shouting desperately for more, after hearing his heated and manipulated speech. Gray and Lyon were left staring at the their T.V., in complete and utter shock. Both of their mouths were hanging open, their minds scrambling to understand what all, was going on. Finally, it was Lyon who asked out loud, what it was, that they had both been wondering.

“What the hell just happened?”

“I don’t have a single-” Gray had started to say, but he suddenly had to stop. All air having left him, once he saw what was happening on the television set next. There on the screen came Juvia! Juvia Lockser, the strange woman he had just met the other day in Pegasus Blue station! She was stepping in front of Jose, as questions were still being thrown at him. She was addressing the mic, as Jose disappeared from view of the cameras.

“Sorry…” She was speaking, leaning in close to the microphone that was coming from the arm, of the nearest reporter. Taking hold of it with her hand, before speaking again, as she didn’t appear to have one clipped to her clothing as Jose had. “Excuse me…” She was saying to get everyone’s attention, as they were still shouting out questions to Jose, even though he had disappeared from view. “Jose will be making no further comment, on the events that unfolded last night… And on behalf of the Phantom Organization, we demand a formal apology be issued out to Aria Heavens and the other members of our Organization, by Magnolia’s police force, for faulty actions made against us… And for the attempted tarnishing of our reputation as an organization… If refused, then the Phantom Organization may resort to cutting the monetary deals and contracts we have in place,
with Magnolia’s Police Force. Thank you and this officially ends our statement.” Juvia finished with a small bow of her head, before finally turning away altogether. The clip sequentially ending, as soon as she had disappeared from view, only to be back in the news room. The camera was now settled on a female reporter.

“Well, there you have it folks! These statements do not-” Gray could not even hear what the woman was saying anymore. His mind was too flabbergasted by everything he had just heard and witnessed.

“Gray? Do you know what the heck happened?” Lyon was asking him, but Gray could say nothing, he was still trying to make sense of it all.

Juvia... She was there on the television set, speaking on behalf of Jose and his whole entire organization... That had to mean, that she was literally his personal and business attorney, and if that were the case... Then... That meant that, Gray needed to leave, right now! Suddenly Gray was turning around and sprinting back into his bedroom, to get properly dressed.

“Gray?!” Lyon was shouting after him. “What the heck are you even doing?! You didn’t answer my question!” Lyon was following Gray to the edge of his bedroom doorway. Lyon was looking inside, as Gray was scrambling through the piles of clothing for something to wear. He had already managed to put on a pair of pants.

“Gray?” Lyon tried again, as Gray was throwing on a red V-neck shirt with a black collar. “What the hell are you doing?” He then asked, as Gray was pulling the shirt down.

“Going to work!” Gray answered simply.

“But what happened to, ‘it’s your day off?!’” Lyon questioned, with a bit of a mocking voice, at the end.

“Yea... but...” Gray managed, grabbing a coat. “I just... I gotta go.” Gray muttered, marching past Lyon and out of his room, towards the door where his boots were.

“Okay fine! Just keep me updated!” Lyon shouted after him.

“You got it!” Gray was saying, as he slipped on his boots and grabbed his keys from the hook by the door.

Juvia... He was repeating her name within his head, still very much liking the way it sounded. A beautiful name, for a very mysterious woman. His brow was lowering with determination as he went out the door, slamming it shut behind him. A smirk of interest was appearing over his face, as he remembered her. She had appeared almost flustered, at times.

Gray had chosen to become a cop, because of a string of painful murders in his past, that were never really solved. And after a whole series of investigations over the years, there hadn’t really been anything damning. With the exception of one tiny lead, that happen to point to someone, who was now, very powerful and held a lot weight in the city Magnolia...

That person was Jose Porla, leader of the Phantom Organization.

Erza was waiting in a claimed spot of her own, just outside of Magnolia’s Justice Center. The
building was a rather formidable skyscraper, with a wide base and gold tinted windows lining it up and down. Presently, the grand stairway was consumed with an eager crowd of people, most of them reporters. All there, for the same reason, to get the latest news on Jose’s statement to the press.

Erza was doing well to ignore them, her malicious gaze was instead trained in on the pencil-necked man, in question. Her appearance, a regular scarlet haired vixen, as she was dawning a tight black coat, that extenuated the shape of her tiny waistline and then her much wider hips in comparison. All in due part with the belt, that was looped and sewed into the jacket’s midsection, the coat’s length ending only mere inches above her knees. Her image made even more pristine, by a pair of dark, body-hugging blue jeans. That she had luckily kept stored in her office to change into, just in case she ever found herself in an overnight situation, like she was currently in now. Her hair was tied back and up into a neat ponytail, her bangs loose and sweeping over her brow, like normal. She was wearing a pair of black leather gloves, to keep her hands warm against the elements, but luckily the snow had stopped well into the morning. Leaving the sky, a crisp fall blue with only fluffy white clouds and rays of golden sunlight, to disturb its veil.

She was waiting with arms folded. Her one elbow and shoulder resting against one of the wide columns, that was responsible for holding up the awning, that hung over the main entrance of the building. Her position was at the top landing of the stairs, and so she was apart from the crowd. Above them really, and a good distance away from where Jose and the young woman, who she now understood to be his attorney, were standing.

They were located more towards the center and they were not alone. Among them were several security thugs of the Phantom Organization. Jose had chosen to bring along three of his own men, to escort them. Then standing among them, another group of security cops as well, who worked for the Justice Center. Their role was to keep the pushy press back and in line.

Erza was watching the display from where she stood. The security officers were doing their best, to keep the rampant reporters a certain distance away from Jose and his young attorney. The Phantom Origination’s full statement had just been announced. Meanwhile, Jose’s men did nothing, but look intimidating as the three of them stood in a line, just behind Jose himself. Their leader then turned towards them, ripping out the mic that had been wired into his clothing and handing it to the nearest man.

The attorney was following closely behind him. Her hands were cupped together, resting down and in front of the lap, of her blue coat. Her demeanor was not at all confident, like what Erza would have expected from someone worthy enough to be Jose Porla’s, self-appointed attorney. Not to mention, she had just had the gull to speak to an entire crowd of aggressive people on live television, with ridiculous demands aimed towards the entirety of Magnolia’s Police force. It was as if she had just slapped them all in the face and then turned around and poured herself a cup of tea.

The two of them were now walking in the direction Erza had been standing. The attorney’s eyes were downcast as she followed behind her employer solemnly, her steps tiny. Jose however, had his beady eyes locked onto Erza. A conniving smirk was forming over his long and narrow face, it was vast and menacing. His long black trench coat was waving back and forth, with each alternating step he would make as he drew near. Finally stopping just feet away from Erza, as she glared up at him with narrowed eyes. His height was awkward, as he almost seemed to lurch, with the way his neck angled down towards her in egotism.

“Ah… Titania…” Jose began in his slimy, but slippery low voice. “So, what do I owe the pleasure?” It gave her a bit of a chill, that he should even address her with this title. It was one that her subordinates had dubbed her in secret a long time ago, but had stuck with her throughout the years. They all thought she didn’t know about it, when really, all along she had, but there was no reason for
anyone outside of the police force to know this bit of personal information about her. So, for this reason alone, she took Jose’s use of it as a personal threat.

“You will address me as Captain!” Erza practically spat the words at him, from underneath her breath. Immediately on edge, her anger apparent. She had no intention of even trying to hide her disdain for him, as Jose had already made this confrontation deeply personal, as intended.

“Of course,” Jose spoke, bowing his head a bit towards her. Closing his eyes as he did so, before picking his head back up and opening them to look at her. “Captain… How could I forget…? It is you, who will be writing me an apology after all, isn’t it?” It was at this point, that Jose had then turned his head and nodded towards Juvia.

It was a signal to leave the two of them alone. Juvia nodded back in response and then began to step away from the captain and her employer. Enough distance to be out of earshot, but not out of sight. She was reaching for the phone in her bag as she did this, intending to call a certain absent, but bullheaded friend of hers. That she had, had yet to hear from, since all of the news had broken out about what had happened to Aria at the Twilight Ogre Casino last night.

Juvia glanced down at the phone that was now in her hand, quickly pulling the number up from her favorites list, and hitting the call button. It rang zero times and instead went immediately to voicemail. She pulled the phone away from her face and looked down at the screen in question, as the voicemail person continued to speak. Confusion and slight worry were plaguing the back of her mind.

Jose’s gaze lowered back to Erza, certain nobody could hear them now, his black eyes began to scale over her face as he recommenced speaking to her again. “And why, don’t you look lovely…?!” Came the words, slithering out from two smirking lips. “Even with that angry scowl across your face!” He added quickly, like a hiss.

“Watch your tongue.” Erza warned, without pause and Jose’s grin faltered a bit at this.

“Why Captain? You never seem to play nice with me, now do you? Or my men for that matter?” Jose drizzled out the sarcastic questions, but Erza was interrupting him before he could utter out anymore nonsense.

“I am not here to play. I am here to arrest murderers. You and your men being among them!” Erza snapped, her brow lowering, the fire essentially lit.

“Well it doesn’t appear like you have any proof of your claims, now do you?!?” Jose raged back, his voice still quiet, but almost frighteningly fierce. Erza said nothing for a moment, she was too angry. Her muscles were tightening, the heat was rolling through her body, causing her shoulders to be too upright. Jose couldn’t help, but smirk again at her silence, his head leaning towards her just a little bit closer, so that his voice could quiet down even further. “You know captain…” He mocked. He was so close and quiet, that Erza could catch the smell and feel of his rancid breath, just ghosting over her face. “You have no need to hunt down murderers for play, when you are already in bed with one… Now do you?” The words were coated in ice as they slid out from Jose’s mouth, so smoothly, that Erza could feel the burn of their chill. Her eyes were wide as Jose continued to speak, so quietly, each word coming slow. “In Rosemary Village… Many years ago, there was a mysterious and very brutal murder… A stabbing… Leaving one man dead… The survivor, his daughter… A young girl by the name of Erza Belserion… Also, from that same small town… Not days later… The disappearance of a young man by the name of Jellal Faust...” Jose paused. “Hmmm…” He glanced up, his eyes boring into hers. “Sticking with the initials J. F. and changing the last name to Scarlet… Not very creative, are we?” He finished, grinning at Erza as he finally pulled back, taking in her
expression with glee. He was quite content with the gravity of his threat, but Erza was beginning to laugh at him. Hard enough that his smile was disappearing again.

“You are a fool Jose! These words! These accusations that you imply…!” Erza’s smile was gone. All laughing had ceased and her face had become a stone worthy glare once again. “They mean nothing to me.” She stated, in her deep and unmoving voice.

“I am not a fool!” Jose countered, the volume control over his own voice suddenly escaping him, upon rapid anger. His eyes were bulging as he continued to speak. His once very restrained and manipulated position, unraveling right before Erza’s very eyes. “Anyone who has chosen to saddle up with that clown Makarov, is a fool!” Jose pointed. “Even his own grandson has disowned him!”

“At least he has a lineage to speak of and to continue on with his legacy, if he so wishes too. What do you have, Jose? Surely, a man as selfish and greedy as yourself, will die alone… With nobody worthy enough to take the reins of your, all too powerful organization.” Erza replied, her voice like the calm before the storm and that was exactly what it was, as Jose began to throw his head back and cackle at her reply.

“Ha ha Titania!” He was laughing hysterically, his largemouth wide and looking a bit deranged as his head neared hers again. “What a mouth you have! I can’t wait to hear it sing me apologies…!” Jose seethed between large square teeth, his crazed and intimidating smile still present, but somebody else was approaching. A tall and slender form of beauty and then a much shorter, smaller person.

It was the very man they had been speaking of and his assistant, Makarov Dreyer and Mirajane Strauss. Jose’s eyes were moving from Erza’s face, to the people who were approaching from behind her. His twisted grin was fading upon their arrival. His lips forming into a more normal, but still creepy smirk, that was more customary for him to wear on his face. His stature was returning to normal, thus giving Erza back the space he had been encroaching on, since their conversation had started.

“So, Makarov…You are here.” Jose greeted in a flat tone, causing Erza to turn her head and smile with quite a bit of relief, once she saw the old man’s stern face.

“Afternoon Jose…” Makarov greeted as Mirajane smiled sweetly. “Just have some business to attend too, with that young lady, you happen to be speaking with. That’s all.”

“Yes… Of course… Well, be my guest… My work here is done, so me and my subordinates will be taking our leave… We have a patient to go visit, in the hospital nonetheless…” Jose added, eyeing Erza down as she watched him with another steely and unfazed glare. “Until the next time, Captain… I’ll be looking forward to hearing that apology from you.” He then finished, with one last smirk, as he began to step away. “Juvia!” He snapped, “Gather the men! And phone for the car! We are done here… Aria is waiting.” Juvia was still standing a good ten feet away. Phone in her hand and up to her ear, but she was bringing it down and pressing the end button, as she watched Jose stride away, rudely. Right in-between Makarov and Mirajane so closely, that it forced the two of them to separate further apart. His coat was trailing behind him dramatically, almost like a long dark cape.

“Yes!” She was calling after him, as she began to scramble, looking towards the group of three men around her. “Let’s go! We’re leaving!” She was hollering timidly, above the noise of the press, before looking to her phone again. She was beginning to dial the number for their driver, who was waiting on standby. She watched as all three men began to form a single file line down the stairs, finally following behind the last of them, as the driver answered the phone.
Erza, Makarov and Mirajane were forced to just stand there and watch, as Jose’s group of four began to take their leave, down the stairs. Until finally they were at least far enough away, that everyone felt confident enough about not being overheard. Erza looked to Makarov first, appreciation evident in her features.

“Thank you for the save, you guys.” She spoke looking to Mirajane too.

“Oh! It’s no problem! You looked like you were in need of it!” Mira chimed, her head tilting as a hand came to her cheek and her eyes closed with delight.

“What did Jose want?” Makarov asked, getting straight to the point. His eye was still trained in on the tall shape of Jose, standing by the intersection in the distance.

“Mostly to make threats.” Erza explained, folding her arms. “He seems to know a lot more about me, than I am comfortable with.” She added uneasily.

“That doesn’t surprise me...” Makarov replied. “Jose makes it a point to get to know his enemies, once he is aware of them...” He added, finally tearing his gaze away from Jose, his sights landing back on Erza instead. “That is why it is important for us to make sure that he doesn’t find out, who most of them are...” Erza nodded in understanding. What he was saying was true, Natsu and the identities of the others involved needed to stay secret, whereas herself, Mirajane and Makarov would stay on the forefront as their shields. “Come now child...” Makarov continued interrupting Erza’s thoughts, “You look tired and pale... You’re in a position of vulnerability... If my dear friend Rob were still alive, I know he would be chewing me out right now, for letting you take on such a dangerous position... So... Let us speak somewhere, that you feel safe.” Erza smiled at the mention of the man, who had taken on raising her and doing it right, after all of the horrible things she had been through in her childhood.

“Let’s just head back to the station... We can speak there privately in my office... And I will fill you in on everything...” Erza explained, her voice soft and Makarov nodded.

Though his disposition still seemed hard, there was something very resolute and comforting about his presence. For he had been right, in his normal and wise, all-knowing way, Erza did feel incredibly vulnerable. She was still worried sick over Jellal, and though she had managed to put on a brave face during Jose’s threats. That did not mean they sat upon deaf ears. She was actually very afraid of the knowledge he seemed to possess about her and even more so Jellal. And lastly, the connection that they shared together, both in past and present.

That information was never meant to see the light of day, and if outed could not only mean the end of her career, but also the end of her life, as she would likely be put behind bars for it. Not to mention, the affects the conspiracy alone might have over the police station, as a whole. Everyone who worked there, could wind up under investigation over something of that magnitude and Erza could not have that. That would put Gray and Elfman’s lives in Jose’s crosshairs, all thanks to her.

Erza looked over the old man’s kind, but stern face. Age worn, yet somehow strong in the face of everything. Surely, he knew all of this... Surely, he understood everything, or at least that was the air Makarov seemed to give off. One of never-ending strength and unity, because it was only he, who could be responsible for bringing such an astounding group of people together, for the one noble purpose of protecting their city.

He also always knew the right words to say, like bringing up the only worthy parental figure Erza had ever had, other than Makarov himself, as a means to comfort her when she was so afraid. No matter what was happening, or how crazy things were becoming, with him there, for the moment, Erza somehow felt reassured and more importantly, safe.
“Shall we go then?” He suddenly asked catching a hint of her smile and returning it just the same. Erza nodded in response.

“Yes, lets.”

“Yes, we’re ready…” Juvia was speaking, now on the phone with the diver about the car. The men were making their leave in the direction Jose had gone, with Juvia in last place, following a small distance behind the last of them. They had made it to the street and were approaching the intersection where Jose was waiting, still some ways away. “Okay…” Juvia added, before moving the phone back down as she walked, the call clearly over.

She was then searching the screen again. Her eyes landing over Gajeel’s name in her phone, once again hitting the call button. She brought it up to her ear, only to receive his voicemail for about the eighth time that day. This time though, she waited and once it beeped, she began to speak.

“Gajeel… It’s me…” She huffed, her voice was quiet and breathless, as she hurried to follow her employer and their group, but also not to be heard by any of them. “Wherever you are… Whatever you are doing… Call me back, before you make your next move… Please…! It is important…! Don’t do anything rash… Especially right now… I hope you are okay… bye…” She finished, immediately bringing the phone down and hitting the end button. Her brow was pushing together with worry, as they approached the intersection of the street.

_Gajeel... Where are you? What are you doing? Please be okay..._

Gajeel’s brow was pushing together upon feeling some great discomfort. Almost the entirety of his whole right arm felt stiff, with the exception of where it hurt like hell in his shoulder. His eyes were opening, a hoarse groan was filtering out from his lungs as he struggled to move. His neck muscles were constricting as he shifted his head, rubbing the back of his mane along the wall he had been leaning against.

He glanced sideways to his right, his vision was somewhat obscured by heavy glares of sunlight, flooding in through the window right beside him. Stagnant particles of dust were floating within the space, glowing and stealing Gajeel’s focus as he squinted to look past the light. He was taking in his surroundings, he could see the outline of Levy’s front door, recalling the night and thus noticing the warmth and weight of her head over his lap.

They were on Levy’s bed, Gajeel was sitting up with his back leaning against the drywall, a pillow propped up under the elbow of his sling arm. He had attempted to sleep in this position, only because it had been too difficult to get comfortable any other way. Levy was lying across the bed the correct way, her back facing him as she used Gajeel’s uninjured leg as a pillow. There was a blanket draped over her legs. Her knees were bent and her hands were clasped together and curled up just in front of her. Her torso was dawned in a simple tank top, her hair was loose and scattered across the span of his leg.

Gajeel was observing her profile, his expression was easing considerably. Her eyes were closed, her breathing was steady and serene as she slept. The pain in his shoulder was howling at him, but it was not as loud as the apprehensive feeling he got while looking at her. His lips were stretching into a frown, his unease was suffocating him from the inside out. This image was far too kind and forgiving to be his reality.
Levy… Her name resounded in his mind. His hand was opening, as he imagined himself caressing the top of her head. Their closeness was inspiring ideas in his head, notions that he would have never even considered before knowing her, but he made no movement to actually do anything about them. No… He responded internally, doing his best to quell the desire entirely. It’s time to wake up… He glanced around regretfully, a heavy sigh heaving out from his chest. From all of this… He thought at last, before lowering his sights back down to Levy.

The hand from his good arm finally came up and rested over Levy’s shoulder. He watched as she shifted some under the weight. A quiet murmur was escaping her lips and it caused him to smirk. Sorry Levy… He thought, his slight smile disappearing. I know I really put you through some bullshit last night… He sighed again.

“Levy…” He finally spoke, trying his best to shake the thought from his mind. “Levy… Wake up…” He spoke again, his voice louder as he jostled her a bit.

“Hmm?” Levy spoke her eyes staying closed, her body unmoving and Gajeel couldn’t fight the smile that was forming in the corner of his mouth.

“Gotta get up, shrimp.” Gajeel replied, trying not to laugh. There was a pause before Levy answered.

“Gajeel?” The tone in her voice sounded tired and confused, as if she were questioning whether or not, it was actually him there. Her brow was crinkling together, even though her eyes still hadn’t opened.

“Uhh… Yea… its me.” He answered uneasily, as Levy finally began to lift her head. Her brow was still mangled together with exhaustion, but her eyes had opened. She was hastily sitting upright, her eyelids slamming shut, thanks to the gleam of light coming in through the window.

“Ugh… So, bright… What time is it?” She shifted away from the light, her one hand shielding her face so that she could see him properly.

Gajeel matched eyes with her, before quickly turning his own head away. It was her appearance that had him glancing in the opposite direction. It was just so ridiculous; her hair was loose and wild in an almost unfathomable way. It even rivaled his own crazy mane and it had him smiling like a dope, at how cute it made her look. He hadn’t wanted her to notice the stupid expression planted over his face, or to pick up on the way he had been eyeing the tight fit of her tank top, so he had chosen to just stare at the wall instead. He was stuck somewhere between wanting to laugh or just stare at her for a long time. Both options somehow subsequently leading to both of his ears becoming a vibrant shade of red, and so, he just sat there refusing to do anything instead.

“Uhh… No clue.” He answered at last, his smile disappearing at the stupidity of his own thoughts. Gajeel was normally so level headed, but right now he was completely out of his element. His throat had gone dry and he was also beginning to sweat, just a bit. His nerves seem to be betraying him, leaving him with a damn teenager like complex around Levy.

The feeling itself was so stifling, that he was actually finding himself relieved that he had managed to answer her question. Proper sentences suddenly seeming like a bit of a stretch in his current state of mind. This was all just too cozy, too normal. Waking up with her like this, was somehow far more intimate for him, than just sleeping with her had been.

There was a long pause between them as Gajeel was left to sort out his thoughts, completely unaware that Levy was looking him over from her spot on the bed. Her head was tilting as she
glanced at his shoulder. She realized he was turned away, but she wasn’t thinking much of it. She was far too concerned with his injuries to really notice or be worried about anything else.

“Gajeel…” Gajeel’s head ducked at the sound of his name. The action resembling that of a child, busted while making trouble. He made no effort to turn around and face her, his stubbornness prevailing overall. “How are you feeling?” He then heard her ask, “Are you in a lot of pain?”

There was a pause as Gajeel considered lying to her. The pain had been miserable enough to keep him from being able to find any proper sleep. He had lost count on how many times he had stirred awake during the early morning hours, before finally giving up on relaxing altogether. The problem with telling her that was, that he didn’t want her poking around with either one of his injuries.

He didn’t really have the energy to deal with his newfound proximity issues concerning her. Thinking about the pain after being asked though, was making his shoulder and leg ache all the more. His wounds were essentially punishing him, for even the mere suggestion of fibbing to Levy.

“Uhh…” Gajeel finally groaned after shifting his position up. His good arm was reaching across his torso for the bad one. He winced as his hand hovered over the sling. “Would you believe me, if I said I wasn’t…?” He asked, half turning to look at Levy, a slight smirk was appearing over his face. She was sitting on her knees now. Facing him with her hands on the mattress. He shifted his gaze away, just as Levy had smiled at him.

“After that pitiful display? I would say not…” She answered with a shake of her head. Gajeel could feel her moving off of the bed, as it dipped just a little from the shift in weight. “Either that, or you are just vying for my attention…” She suggested, her small feet padding to the ground.

Gajeel glanced up at her, her back was facing him and he could not help, but steal a glance below her waistline. She was wearing tiny shorts and running both hands over her head and through her hair, in an attempt to get the loose strands out of her face.

He moved his sights back up, he was shifting his own body forwards, but his leg was making it very painful. He took in an audibly sharp breath, before finally managing to edge both legs completely over the mattress. He was now sitting on the bed, with his feet touching the ground. His head bowed down as he exhaled that same heavy breath. His sights were now locked to the floorboards.

Levy hadn’t moved from her spot, but she had turned back around to face him. He could see her bare feet in the top peripheral of his vision and he knew that she was staring at him. Probably worried again, he managed to hold up the remnants of his smirk through a cringe.

“Don’t I already got it?” His voice was once again flowing with that same familiar smugness, that he was so known for, after having been abandoned by it not minutes before. His head was moving up, so that he could look at her with one studded brow higher than the other.

Levy appeared to be contemplating him with a curious expression, one that he couldn’t quite place. Maybe somewhere in the realm of annoyed or confused, as her eyes seem to be narrowing in on him.

“Truthfully…” She finally replied, a bit more serious sounding than Gajeel had expected, after the slight bit of teasing, “You do.” She acknowledged. “But I wish you didn’t…” She then added, sounding somewhat regretful.

Her face was looking forlorn, as she glanced away from him. She was turning elsewhere, stepping towards the kitchen and that was when Gajeel realized, that he did indeed know the expression she had been wearing and he knew it well. It was the one emotion that he had struggled with more than any other since meeting Levy, guilt.
He was watching her, as Levy appeared to be reaching up for one of the cabinets in her tiny kitchenette. Her hand was opening the cover door, before shuffling around inside of it, but she couldn’t really see what it was, that she was reaching for, as she was far too short. Gajeel found himself a bit envious of the fact, that she could at least, move around freely as she pleased, unlike him, at the moment. He was quickly letting that go, in light of this new revelation about her, though.

Guilt. It had to be the one driving factor, responsible for Levy having done everything she had, for him thus far. The one issue Gajeel couldn’t wrap his brain around, was the reasoning behind her guilt, as there was no logical explanation for it, that he could see.

Gajeel continued to ponder this, as Levy was walking back towards him, holding a glass of water and something else closed up in her other hand. Her gaze was fixated on him, as she drew near and suddenly it was like he couldn’t look away.

Any semblance of hope that he had ever had, of her possibly returning his feelings, was breezing through him like the hollow breath of death. Devoid of all oxygen. Her motives seeming so clear and obvious to him in hindsight. Even if he didn’t understand the reasons why she felt guilty, he knew she did. It didn’t even really matter why, honestly. The fact that he could now align guilt to just about everything she had done so far, since the first night he had met her, had just opened his eyes to one of the great fatalities of her character.

Gajeel glanced down quickly, Levy had appeared right in front of him, but he couldn’t look at her anymore. He was too bothered and hurt by his own assumptions of her motives. She was moving her hand towards him, he could feel her hovering.

“Pain medicine Gajeel…” She spoke at last. “It really isn’t that strong, so it might not do much, but it is better than taking nothing.” She added. Gajeel closed his eyes.

“Levy… You know you don’t owe me anythin’ right?” He asked not bothering to take the medicine. Levy’s hand lowered back to her side at this. “That you don’t… You didn’t have to do any of this right?” He opened his eyes and looked back up at her. She tilted her head, her brow was coming together in confusion, as he continued. “I feel like, you think you owe me, fer savin’ you at the club still… But you don’t… You never really did… That was all my fault anyways, like I told you before.”

“Gajeel.” She interrupted, before he could press on. “Yes... I know. If anything, you’ve been really difficult about letting me help you, from the start. So... yea. It is kind of hard to forget, especially when you are so stubborn about it.”

“Yea, and I think you hear me, but ya don’t really believe it.” He interjected quickly, before she could say anymore. He shook his head before continuing, “Cause otherwise, I can’t make sense of why you are doin’ all of this…” Levy’s one eyebrow was lifting. “You say I have yer attention… And I say, that doesn’t make any god damn sense!” He didn’t yell, but the frustration was there, like a growl. “I think you feel guilty… I don’t know why I never saw it before... But I see it now. It makes no sense Levy. You and I don’t make any sense!” He seethed.

Levy’s mouth opened like she was going to respond, but she couldn’t think of anything to say right away. She was too put off, by the suddenness of Gajeel’s outburst and so, her lips closed again. They stared at each other in silence, for a solid ten seconds. Gajeel looking genuinely irked, while Levy again, had that same almost unreadable expression over her face. Then finally, once the moment had passed and the room didn’t cease to exist, it was Levy who chose to speak.
“And I think you are projecting yourself onto me, Gajeel…” She stated softly, watching as Gajeel’s expression changed to one of disbelief.

His mind was numbing over with the words, because he knew they were true, as soon as he had heard her say them. This wasn’t something he could deny, but it wasn’t something he could have noticed without her pointing it out to him, as well.

“You know…” Levy finally started to say. Her voice sounding much lighter, as it broke through and interrupted Gajeel’s dumbfounded thoughts. She was beginning to move closer, turning around and plopping down onto the mattress, right next to him. Her thigh was nearly brushing his own. The distance was just enough, so that she would not be touching him. “You might just be, the most guilt conscious man I have ever met...” She added gently, as she appeared to be looking up and off into space.

Gajeel meanwhile, was staring down at his own jean clad knee, and the white skin of her thigh, next to his leg. He could sense Levy’s head moving back to face his and that was when her small hand appeared in his sights. Open palmed, with three small pills in the middle of it.

“Here…” She spoke, causing him to steal a glance back up at her. He was surprised to find her smiling, though it was faint, it was there. He stared, unsure of what to do or say. He could feel his stomach recoiling at the slight gesture and his throat was closing up like before.

Finally, he just reached for the pills with his good hand, opening it up, so that she could drop them into his palm. He threw all three into his mouth at once, and then Levy wordlessly handed him the glass of water she had been holding. She watched with that same smile as he downed about half of it, to push the pills back, before glancing away again, like she might laugh. Gajeel swallowed loudly, his throat making a slight gulping sound once the pills and water were gone. He turned his head forwards, doing his best to avoid looking back at her, despite how much he actually wanted too.

“So… How do you figure?” He finally asked, referring to her earlier accusation of him. His head and eyes purposely turning in the opposite direction of her again. Levy turned to face him, her smile was still intact and growing a little.

“Really…? You don’t see it?” She asked him skeptically, finally urging him to look back at her.

“No…” He answered definitively, before continuing, “I’m selfish... I act on impulse... I don’t regret or think-”

“And you hate yourself...” Levy spoke, her eyes shifting down to look at her hands as they moved in front of her. Gajeel again had to stare at her incredulously, she was no longer smiling. “Signs of a guilty conscious…” She stole a glance back up at him, her expression was soft, even though she was not smiling. Gajeel found it somehow more captivating as she continued to speak. “I think maybe… That is why, it probably doesn’t even matter what I say to you Gajeel… Because right now, you seem to be looking for reasons to get away from me…” Her eyes were half lidded as they matched his and her expression was a bit wistful. Gajeel’s brow was lowering in confusion, his jaw tensing and hanging open a little, as he struggled to think of what to say.

“You-” He started, but then stopped to shake his head. “I’m not lookin’ fer reasons Levy! They already exist! You know that!” He wasn’t quite yelling, but his voice was definitely heightened. Levy looked back down and nodded at this.

“Because it isn’t safe…” Levy replied, suddenly getting to her feet quickly and walking towards the desk in front of them, across the small room.
“Well… Yea!” Gajeel replied, unsure of what was happening right now. This was not a conversation he was expecting to have. He set the glass of water down on the floor, cringing with the bending motion of it, before looking back up at her.

She was standing across from him, her hip jutting against the desk for support as her arms folded together stiffly, showcasing her discomfort. Her chin was angled down, her large eyes glued to the floor, still with that same melancholy look to them.

“Levy… You were the one who asked me to let you, help out this one last time and… I stayed one more night, against my better judgement, but, because you asked me too…” He looked elsewhere, the expression in her eyes was eating away at his guilt. “Now I’m gettin’ the feeling that yer intentions are different than I expected…”

At this Levy stood up straight again, leveling onto both feet evenly. Her arms were unfolding and pinning to her sides as well. She looked back up at him, her eyebrows were lowering over her eyes.

“I’m not sure how I am supposed to let you go…” She admitted, and her voice sounded lost and her expression matched it. Gajeel’s head snapped back up to look at her, after hearing this. His eyes were widening, almost as if he wasn’t sure, he had heard her right. “The state you are in Gajeel… You won’t be able to do anything for yourself…” Levy then added, glancing down again.

Gajeel immediately closed his eyes after hearing that, his disappointment clearer than autumn’s afternoon sky. A wave of heat had just moved over him and then passed on by, now leaving him cold. For a moment, he had thought that just maybe, Levy was confessing to him, but that just hadn’t been the case. He had misunderstood.

“I can help you, you know? I think you’re going to kind of need me too, with your shoulder like that…” Levy spoke again. “Do you even know what it will take, to make sure you recover fully…?” Gajeel was shaking his head, his eyes still closed.

“It doesn’t matter…” He said, dejectedly, finally opening them and locking eyes with her. “I’ll do what I need too…”

“Including, staying away?” She asked somberly, only serving to harden Gajeel’s intense stare on her. “Tell me Gajeel… Is it easier for you to stay away from me, if you believe that I am just doing everything out of guilt?” She asked folding her arms stiffly again, like she was cold.

“It’s never easy with you, Levy.” He answered lowly, making it a point to shift his gaze away from her, when he said it. “Why do you think I am so bad at it…?” He then asked her bitterly. Levy stood there, a bleak look coming over her face, as she watched Gajeel stare off into the light from her window. “I really don’t want you to get hurt though…” He finally added off handedly. His gaze was distant, as the words left his mouth and Levy could recognize the expression.

She knew he was thinking about Thibault again, and what he had almost done to her. Her heart ached, as she remembered Gajeel from the night, that they were together. The moments leading up to when she had kissed him for the first time, on her own accord. He had been so very lost and unable to handle his anger and guilt… It was somehow heartbreaking… She started to step towards him, regaining his attention, as she came near.

“Gajeel…” He matched eyes with her upon hearing his name “Do you remember the day that you left, while I was in the shower? I was pretty upset and angry with you for ditching me like you did…” A slight smile had appeared over her face, as she glanced away like she might laugh. “But…” Her next step was delayed, as she looked back up at him. “I think I was angrier at myself, for being dumb enough to believe, that you wouldn’t do that in the first place…”. She finished, her smile gone...
again, as she glanced down. “Especially, when I already knew about your reputation. Not that any of that matters now… It’s beside the point.” She finished, with a small shake of her head, before matching eyes with him again. “What I was trying to say…” She paused, to gather her bearings. Taking a deep breath, that Gajeel could literally see move through her chest. “As that day went on… I found that I couldn’t get you off of my mind, but… It wasn’t my anger that was keeping you there…” She paused again. Her brow was furrowing together a bit, as she stared at him, now lost in the memory. “It was my worry…” She explained, before glancing back down at her feet with a small exhale. Her head was moving down too, as she rocked her body forwards a bit. Taking another small step towards him. “You see, you had been so hurt when I last saw you.” She stated, taking another step or two. “And then you were just gone…” She was now fairly close, only about a foot or two away. She looked back up, her eyes finding his, with a serious expression. “For all I knew, I might never see you again. That had been part of the plan, anyways…” She looked up and away. “And that bothered me… So much… I felt sick over it. How would I even know if you were alive…?” She seemed to be asking some higher power. “I just wouldn’t…” She added, her voice softening again, as her head lowered. “So, you see… Before I told you, that you, had my attention, but I wish you didn’t… Well…” She finally looked back up at him. Her eyes meeting his with a pensive stare. “I wish you didn’t, because now, I am always going to be afraid about what might happen to you next.” Her voice was urgent, almost as if she was trying to make him understand the gravity of her words. “So, do you see? It’s, because I don’t want you to get hurt either…” She explained at last, finally silent with that same earnest expression over her face.

Gajeel immediately looked away from Levy, once he knew she had finished speaking. There was a strong beat in his chest. He opened his mouth to take in the air, but the breath that left him, was instead like a fluttering, bundle of nerves and frustration that he couldn’t quite grasp.

“Levy…” He finally managed in a low, weak voice. His distress levels were made apparent by the sound. “I can’t…” He started with a huff. “I can’t do anything about that.” He finished. His good hand was going up to his face, landing on his forehead and left eye. “I can’t promise, I won’t get hurt… I can’t promise, you won’t…”

“No… But you can stay close enough, so that I will know what is going on…” Levy stated. “So, I don’t have to always sit around and wonder.”

“Except for the day that I don’t come back.” Gajeel uttered, his hand dropping as he turned to look back at her. “Do you really think, us bein’ around each other is goin’ to stop the inevitable Levy?” He asked, his voice fierce. “It won’t. One day I will be dead or just gone and you probably won’t know what happened to me.” Levy’s hands were closing into tight fists.

“You don’t know that Gajeel…” She replied gently.

“Well neither do you.” He stated firmly, in comparison.

“You’re right…” Levy answered, looking down for a moment. “But… For how much longer, am I supposed to waste my time and energy on maybes and might be’s, when nothing is certain to begin with…?” Her voice was soft, as she stared at the ground. Almost like she was searching for the answer there, below her feet. “How many more times in my life, must I allow fear to dictate my choices…?” She added gently, her voice still quiet.

“Levy…” Gajeel spoke, gaining her eyes back over his. “This choice isn’t just on you. This one is on me, also.” Levy stared at him, her expression sad. Almost as if she knew, that he had already made up his mind.

“Are you going to take it away from me, then?” She asked, her voice sounding so hurt, that Gajeel had to look down.
“I don’t know.” He answered abruptly. His hand was coming up to pinch the bridge of his nose. He truthfully didn’t know what to do. For once in his life he was trying to do the right thing and here Levy was, making him feel like it was somehow wrong. “I… I don’t want too.” He admitted, his voice softening as well.

Levy swallowed and looked away at that. She could feel a chill coming over her, all due to the anguish and reality of the situation. Her eyes felt glossy, but no tears spilled. She looked back up at Gajeel, he again looked so lost. Just like the other night, as he sat there bent over and stuck in such a hopeless position. I put him there… She thought regretfully, wishing to make things easier on him.

“Gajeel…” She spoke at last, getting his attention. He looked back up at her, from underneath his one hand. “Maybe we don’t need to figure this out right now…” Levy then added, her voice still soft. “Let’s just not… Let’s just not talk about this anymore…” She offered, her eyes going downcast, again.

Gajeel’s hand lowered away from his face, so that he could look at her fully, with his head still bent. Levy met his gaze in return, it was her way of silently confirming that she had meant, what she had said. Gajeel’s sights lowered at that, the problem with her suggestion was that, he didn’t know when they would ever have another chance to finish the conversation.

“I have to get ready for class anyways…” She then added, in an attempt to change the subject. Gajeel felt the corner of his mouth curve up, just a bit at the mention of her studies, despite the solemnity of the moment. He glanced back up at her, but she was looking down and elsewhere. His tiny smile was growing, as he tried his best to lift his head from the fog of the situation.

“Guess I shouldn’t be surprised that yer still going to go to class, even with next to no sleep in you…” Levy turned back to meet his stare, a small smile appearing over her face.

“I’ll have you know, I intentionally missed one class yesterday…” She replied half-heartedly and Gajeel laughed a bit at that.

“Oh whoa! One class! Big stuff…” He mocked, before continuing to speak. “Ya ever think that maybe I tease you bout it, out of pride?” He then asked, still smiling, his one arm hovering over his bad shoulder, as he cringed a bit. The laughing made him hurt, due to his position.

“Pride?” Levy repeated in question. “What are you doing? Bragging about me, to your friends or something? I thought nobody was supposed to know about us?”

“Us?” Gajeel then repeated a bit skeptically and that was when Levy turned away and started to walk towards the bathroom.

“Right… Never mind.” She chimed, reaching for the door. “I’m going to take a shower.” She spoke.

“I mean there’s Juvia… That’s it!” Gajeel exclaimed, basically yelling after her. Levy had paused by the door to respond.

“Well, I mean sure… But it’s not like she knows that.” Levy began, noticing the way that, Gajeel was blankly staring at her. “Wait… Does she?!” Levy then asked, thinking better of herself, once she caught Gajeel’s deadpanned expression.

“Uh…” Gajeel started.

“Gajeel? Did you tell her?!” Levy demanded, her hands going to her hips. Her face was beginning to turn red, as she yelled at him, awareness taking its form.
“Oi relax shrimp! I didn’t have too!” At that Levy was turning her head away from him, her hand going over her face in embarrassment. “She just kind of figured it out… I mean c’mon! I left things here…” Levy’s hand dropped down at that, as she looked up at him completely irritated. “It was kind of obvious.” He added slyly.

“Maybe in your world, but not in mine!” Levy cried out in alarm. “Great!” She then snapped sarcastically to the air, her eyes swiveling around the room. “She doesn’t even know me, now what’s she going to think?!” She finally exclaimed, shifting her sights back down at Gajeel, who was almost doubling over in laughter, because of this.

“Stop makin’ me laugh, it hurts…!” He howled between breaths. “Man…!” He finally gasped out. “You really make a big deal out of nothin’, ya know…?” He announced, bringing a finger up to his one eye, to wipe at a straying tear.

“Oh, I’m glad you find this so funny.” Levy conveyed, rather annoyed.

“Now calm down, shrimp…” Gajeel expressed gently, doing well to keep his own composure, in lieu of the pain. “Juvia doesn’t think bad of you er anythin’ like that… Trust me…” He explained with a large grin. “And even if she did… Who cares!” He shrugged, but that just made his head snap down, from the soreness that the slight gesture caused. “Ahh damn…” He seethed.

“Mm-hmm… Karma.” Levy chimed, her arms folding as she watched him with a satisfied expression over her face.

“It was worth it…” Gajeel answered with a groan, as he looked up at her and he smirked between the cringe.

“Glad you are so pleased with yourself, Gajeel…” Levy then said with a shake of her head. “Now, I need to go shower.” She reminded him, her hand reaching for the door of the bathroom once more and opening it. She had stepped inside and out of sight, but only to take a few steps backwards, and appear again, not seconds later. “Hey…” She then addressed Gajeel once more, with a nod in his direction.

“Yea?” He asked, confusion evident all over his face.

“Promise me, you won’t disappear this time?” She then asked and Gajeel just nodded with a smile and a shake of his head.

“I won’t… I swear… Might be hard to anyways…” He added, gesturing towards his leg and shoulder.

“Yea sure… That’s what I thought the last time, but you proved me wrong…” Levy spoke, with a slight angle of her head.

“I won’t… I promise… But I might need to use yer phone… If that is okay?” At that Levy paused and turned to face him. “Mine is dead… And unless you have an outdated charger, for a cheap burner phone, then… I jus really need ta call someone… Kinda worried bout how long it’s been, since I’ve been outta touch and all.” Gajeel explained casually.

“It’s okay, I understand…” Levy answered, suddenly walking back towards the desk to pick up her discarded phone. She had, had it plugged into the charger on top of the desk, so that it could charge while the two of them slept. She walked over to Gajeel and then handed the phone over, once she had plucked it from its cord. “The pass code is 0487.” She explained, he took it graciously and smiled up at her.
“Thanks shrimp.” He replied gratefully, as Levy returned the smile.

“Sure…” She answered, stepping back towards the bathroom with her weak smile, still intact. Gajeel watched as she began to walk away, but she again had to stop, just before stepping into the bathroom, to turn and look at him again “So… You’ll still be here, when I come out then?” She questioned once more, as a reconfirmation. Her paranoia was so obvious, that It actually impressed him, how concerned she was about leaving him there. She really had been serious; about how much it had bothered her the first time.

“I swear shrimp… I ain’t goin’ anywhere this time. Promise…” He answered sincerely. Doing his best to quell any fears she might have, and Levy just nodded in response.

“Okay. Just…” She turned her head. “Making sure…” She spoke gently, finally walking into the bathroom and shutting the door quietly behind her.

Gajeel exhaled upon Levy disappearing, he then glanced down at the phone in his hand. His head was swimming with everything Levy and him had just spoken about, but he knew he couldn’t think about any of that right now. He needed to focus on the situation at hand, which included him finding help from someone who wasn’t Levy and getting in contact with Jose or Juvia, as soon as possible. Preferably Juvia, as he wasn’t really looking forward to facing Jose again, after the obvious threat that was their last visit at the Shark Tank. Especially in his current and sorry beat up state, with literally no good news to report. The Salamander had gotten away, after all.

Gajeel shook his head, another huff was escaping him as he thought about the pink haired bastard and the warehouse fire, he had apparently caused. A whole other mess Gajeel wasn’t quite sure yet, how he was going to fix, but there was no sense in putting it off either. He knew that would only make things worse, as eventually Jose would find out, so best to act as soon as he was able too, rather than wait around for the worse to happen.

“Here we go…” He finally muttered, pressing a button on Levy’s phone to bring up the passcode entry screen. “Zero… Four… Eight… Seven…” He spoke while simultaneously pressing each button with his large thumb. “Wonder what it means…” He wondered out loud to nobody as the phone screen suddenly came to life. “Okay... Got it... Now.” He pressed the call button and began punching in a number he knew by heart. Once done, he hit the call button and shoved the phone up by his ear. It began to ring and Gajeel listened until a pleasant, but very deep voice suddenly answered the phone.

“Extalia Bodyshop and repair!”

“Hey man… It’s me.” Gajeel answered in a low voice

“Yo, Gajeel? It’s been forever, man!” A proud and joyful laughter followed the voice, on the other end. “What’s goin’ on?”

“Uh… yea…” Gajeel groaned. “Actually buddy, I kind of need yer help…”

Levy had just finished her shower and was towel drying her hair, looking at her reflection in the steam framed mirror. Her eyes were glazing over the cut that spanned across the side of her forehead. She ran her fingers over it, feeling the roughness of the disturbed skin, before finally huffing dismissively and turning away. She was in a bit of hurry; her hands were a bit sporadic as she
attempted to dry herself quickly. Her mind was telling her that she needed to act fast, because Jet and
Droy would soon be at her front door. Ready to walk her to school, but deep down, she knew their
incoming arrival was not the reason for her stress, it was really Gajeel.

Levy glanced up at her expression again and let out a small exasperated sigh, her nerves essentially
causing her stomach to cringe with worry. That cold mortified feeling she had, had the moment she
had discovered him gone the day before, was returning to her and making her feel, as if the floor had
just escaped out from underneath her own feet. She knew it was childish to be so concerned,
especially when Gajeel had already reassured her so many times, but it didn’t stop the estranged
feeling from taking over.

Being around Gajeel seem to dampen all logic, though not blindly. Levy was very aware of how
irrational she was becoming, but with everything that had happened to her lately, it was hard to
know, what should be considered normal anymore. She was beginning to wonder if everything she
had been through, was just making her into some kind of unstable lunatic, because she couldn’t seem
to stop herself from, forming up crazy ideas in her head.

Like still being able to see Gajeel after all of this was supposed to be done and over with… Levy’s
mind chimed in, as she recalled the suggestion she had proposed to him earlier, before taking her
shower. She hadn’t known what exactly she had been hoping for entirely, with that conversation.
She just knew that, she somehow needed to convince Gajeel, that it was critical for him to continue
to allow her to assist him, because he genuinely needed it. And, because it hurt her to know that he
might instead, be left to suffer alone. He seemed so reluctant to rely on anyone and she found that
incredibly sad.

Everybody needs somebody to lean on, at some point. Even if it is only for a little while… Levy
thought, thinking of herself in the past, as she understood that notion and its importance better than
most. After losing the majority of her family at such a young age, it had taken some time for Levy to
learn how to rely on others again, but accepting people was just the first part of trying to move on
from that kind of pain.

Gajeel seemed to be stuck in a state of eternal immobility and hell bent on keeping it that way. His
own acknowledgement of what he was doing to himself, was not only clear, but also disturbing.
Levy could not comprehend, why anyone would willingly doom themselves to a life of seclusion,
such as he seemed to be determined to do. That reluctance to accept help, even when he was so
badly in need of it, had opened her eyes to the reality of Gajeel’s true disposition. He was truly self-
loathing.

But who am I to judge him? Levy’s thoughts questioned, as she reflected in on herself. The fact that I
have allowed myself to rely on others so much… I’ve let it build into a weakness. I don’t even trust
my own judgements anymore… She couldn’t help, but think about her own constant doubts, like the
decisions she had made about the hospital. Gajeel and Wendy had both needed to reassure her, on
more than one separate, occasion. I’m always looking to others instead… And those people around me… The ones I’ve allowed myself to rely on, so heavily… Levy could picture Lucy, Jet and Droy
in her mind’s eye. They all seem so much larger and more capable than myself… She could see an
image of herself growing smaller, as she thought about this. I often feel helpless in comparison, so
maybe in some ways… She paused, inhaling a small breath. I dislike myself, too… And there is was,
the dark truth, or at least some semblance of it.

Levy’s eyelids lowered, as she took it in, unsure if she actually believed it, herself. I cannot pretend
like I am the stronger one, out of the two of us. Her mind spoke, thinking of Gajeel. I have not
walked through my life unscathed… I’ve let the circumstances, warp and mold me, just as much…
Her expression eased, as she pictured him in his hunched over and lost position once again. So, I
wonder… What horrors did Gajeel have to endure to become who he is today…? She questioned internally, as she thought about the life he led and the scars on his skin. Maybe I don’t actually want to know…

Levy glanced up at herself in the mirror again. She was gently pressing a bandage over the healing wound on her forehead. She knew she wasn’t being honest with herself. The truth was, that she did want to know. She wanted for nothing more, than to understand Gajeel better, even if it was just a little bit, but she was making a choice right then and there. She was never going to ask him about it. At least, that was one promise she could keep to herself, not only for his benefit, but for her own as well. A small attempt at trying to reign in her growing investment towards him.

After a few minutes went by, Levy had finished inspecting the now covered wound on her head. She looked away from the mirror, finally satisfied with how it had come out. She then bent down to pick up her shorts and slip them on, followed by the tank top she had been wearing, right over her head. Once dressed, she looked to the door.

‘Nothing is certain. She thought. Even we are unclear… Her eyes were shifting down to look at the doorknob. But that is okay...

Her hand was reaching for the doorknob apprehensively. Her fingers just grazing it, as her heart skipped a beat. That same fear was gripping at her like before. The fear that Gajeel just might be gone again, history repeating itself. She inhaled sharply. I don’t need to know what is coming, nor do I need to have all of the answers…I just need to have faith… She thought, suddenly pushing the door open abruptly and nearly stumbling out into the other room.

“Levy?! What the hell! You okay?!” Gajeel exclaimed, from his spot, on Levy’s bed. Thankfully Levy was able to catch herself, before falling completely and was standing up straight, in recovery. She turned to face him, a large smile appearing over her lips, as Gajeel continued to speak to her with wide eyes. “What the hell are you doin shrimp?! You wanna end up lookin’ like me?!” He asked with disbelief.

I’ll just enjoy the time we do have… Levy thought and Gajeel was just staring at her, still in shock as she said nothing.

“What?” He finally asked, becoming confused by her silence and her stare. “Are you alright?!” He then asked again and Levy just shook her head with a small laugh.

“Yea… Sorry! I’m fine.” She answered. “Just being a klutz.” She explained as she finally walked towards her dresser to open it and pick out some clothes to wear for the day. Gajeel watched her a bit perplexed and finally seemed to accept her answer in time, as he noticed her pulling out a shirt.

“What ya doin’?” He then asked. Levy glanced at him from the side, as she continued to pull out some clothes.

“My friends will be here soon.” She answered, nodding towards the clock. “To walk me to class… I’m not going like this.” She explained.

“Oh yea? Why not?” And Levy just shot him a displeased stare that made Gajeel smirk. “Well I thought you looked good… But I guess it is cold out.”
“Yea, yea… I know.” Levy muttered, finally stepping back towards the bathroom, with the clothes she had picked out for the day, to change. She walked away disappearing inside.

“So, who are these ‘so called friends yer talkin’ bout anyways?’” Gajeel hollered through the closed door. He could hear Levy from the other side, she was slipping on some jeans as she answered back.

“Jet and Droy… I’ve known them for like… Forever!” She explained.

“Okay…” Gajeel answered, pondering to himself over the names, until suddenly the door opened back up and Levy stepped back out, fully dressed. The two of them looked at each other, as Levy continued to speak, pulling on a sock.

“They are basically my best friends… And they walk me to class, most days…” She explained, looking to the clock. “They should be here any minute now… And I don’t want to risk them coming to the door and seeing you.” She explained, as her head turned back, and her eyes directed to the window, which showed the front of the apartment building. Almost like she was checking to see if they were out there yet.

Gajeel in turn, half glanced over his good shoulder to look out the same window, before turning back around. Levy’s eyes were back on him, once he looked up and that was when her face grew concerned.

“So…” She began hesitantly, making it clear she hadn’t actually wanted to ask. “What are you going to do, once I am gone?” She then finished, eyeing him carefully and hoping for the truth. Gajeel glanced down, he was still holding her phone in his hand and he was looking at it, before he spoke. His mouth opened and he then looked back up at her, meeting her eye.

“I called someone who is comin’ here to get me… Someone I trust.” He then reached his hand towards her, offering her the phone back.

“So, you are leaving then.” Levy clarified, taking the device back. Her eyes were staring at it, as she held it in her hand. It wasn’t a question with the way she had spoken it and Gajeel glanced down again, his head bowing as he nodded. Levy shoved the phone into the back pocket of her jeans, before looking back up at him.

“Yea…” Was all he said and that was when Levy glanced away from him again.

“Okay…” She answered, accepting this. Somehow, she wasn’t surprised. “Thank you for telling me this time and for being honest.” She added, trying to keep her voice light.

“I just have some things to take care of...” Gajeel explained. “But about before…” Gajeel started, but Levy interrupted him.

“Don’t worry about it, Gajeel… I understand.” Gajeel looked up at her and Levy returned his gaze. “I said we don’t have to talk about it anymore and I meant it.”

“Yea…” Was all he could muster in response, they sat in silence for a moment, until suddenly Levy spoke. She had looked up, her eyes on the window again.

“They...”

Gajeel turned some on the bed, to see a tall carrot top man and then a rather fat and round one, following suit just behind the first. They were headed towards the entrance to Levy’s apartment building.
“I’ve got to go.” Gajeel heard Levy say. He turned back around, only to find her mere inches from him. Before he could move in reaction, she was already reaching for him and wrapping one arm around his neck. Her head was pushing past his good shoulder. Her hair was brushing past his cheek, as she gave him a very gentle one-armed embrace, out of fear of hurting him.

Gajeel stiffened as she held to him lightly and began to speak, close to his ear.

“Please take the pain medicine with you… And more importantly… Take care of yourself…” Her voice was soft and full of worry, before she began to pull away from him. Her eyes were just above his own, in her standing position. She was searching over him, a very tender, but serious expression across her face. Almost as if she had been trying to capture the memory of him, just in case she really never did see him again. Gajeel could form no words, he could only stare and watch her every movement. He was rocked far beyond comprehensible thought, as the moment had time stamped his poor brain into bleeding submission.

Then finally, Levy turned away from him, with nothing more for Gajeel to grasp onto, without feeling like the fool he knew he was. He had already disputed her reasons for staying and given her more than enough ammo to never come back to him and yet now… As she stepped away from him… That was all he wanted.

He felt the sting of his own stupidity in those seconds, as he watched her back retreat. Too dumbfounded and mesmerized to say the words, he knew he just wanted to throw at her.

I love you Levy… I know, I am a fucking idiot… but don’t go…

Gajeel’s head bowed, as his eyes closed and his hand came up to his forehead in distress. Levy didn’t notice him, as she grabbed her coat from the couch and threw it over her shoulders. He opened his eyes and let his hand fall away, just as he heard the sound of her grabbing her bag and keys. He looked up just in time, to see her step towards the door and glance up at him.

“Lock the door behind you…?” She asked and then paused, in wait for a reply. Gajeel could only nod, a grim expression planted over his face. “Goodbye…” She then spoke softly in response, her eyes going downcast again, before finally opening the door and walking out, gently closing it behind her.

Gajeel listened for the firm sound of the second door in the hall, opening and then closing shut behind her, as she walked outside. He then turned his stiff body, his bones snapping and cracking in pain with the movement, so he could watch Levy appear outside through the window. Her two weird looking friends were smiling like idiots, upon seeing her step out and Gajeel could see the profile of her face as she came into view. She appeared to be smiling too, but her eyes looked a little sad.

“Goodbye… Levy…” Gajeel finally managed to the empty room and her smiling appearance out the window.

Gray was marching up the stairs to the police station with his head bowed and his hands concealed inside the pockets of his coat. He was watching the pavement, his expression mirroring the steadfast notion, that was currently draped over his shoulders. He needed to find his superior, he needed to speak to Erza as soon as possible. His pace was even, but quick as his boots
crunched over a mixture of salt and slush. The outside air was still cold, but the late afternoon sun was heating up his back, right up until he pushed his way through the double doors of the building.

Once inside, Gray was making his way in a straight line. Walking right past security and completely ignoring the guard who had waved to him upon recognition. Next, he darted for the elevator, catching it before anybody else could. Selecting his floor and then stepping out, once he had reached it.

His body was moving like a robot, carrying him right on the path towards Ezra’s office. No stops, no interruptions, everyone else in the department just may have well of, not even existed. That was until a large hand from behind him, came clasping right down onto Gray’s shoulder, just as he had been about to reach Erza’s door.

Gray whipped around fast, like he just might kill the person who had stopped him from reaching his destination. His eyes were wide and his breathing tense, as he glanced up into the gentle face of Elfman, who was looking down at him with clear worry etched into his features.

“Whoa…! It’s okay man…!” Elfman spoke out in alarm. He was taking his free hand back from Gray’s shoulder and bringing the other hand, full of paperwork, up in front of his chest. As if that would somehow protect him from the oncoming attack, that was never even going to come. “It’s just me.” He then added calmly, as he watched Gray’s chest pant up and down, before the smaller cop seemed to realize this and settle down. “What the hell are you doing here?” He then asked, bringing both of his arms back down.

“Yea…” Gray sighed, glancing down at his feet. “I just… I need to go and talk to Erza. Right now. It can’t wait.” Gray explained, his sentences were short and urgent. He then started turning back towards the closed office door, without another breath.

“Hold on…!” Elfman practically gasped, as he reached out for Gray again, who turned around to face his partner, in question. “Don’t go in there right now, man…” Elfman warned, his hand falling back down. “It’s just…” The large man sighed. “It’s not a good time…”

Gray was looking back up at Elfman, confusion evident all over his face. He swiveled his head back around, in the direction of Erza’s office. Finally taking note of how all of the blinds to her windows were closed, so nobody could see inside. Gray turned back around to face Elfman, his expression becoming serious.

“Makarov and my sister were in there earlier, with her… They actually just left shortly before you showed up.” Elfman explained.

“What the hell happened, Elfman?” Gray asked, his voice concerned. “What is going on?!” He demanded, his frustration clear, but Elfman was shaking his head in response.

“Man… I don’t even know… I’m missing some parts myself… But something is wrong with Erza too… I’ve never seen her like this.” He explained and at that Gray was turning away from Elfman again, back towards her office door.

“Okay…” He was muttering to himself, reaching for the handle.

“What are you doing?!” Elfman exclaimed, becoming worried.

“I’m goin’ in there damn it!” Gray stated. “I’m goin’ ta get to the bottom of this! Even if Erza kills me!” He snapped, grabbing the door and twisting it open. Elfman was backing away with his hands up in surrender, wanting no part of this.
“Your funeral, man…” He was saying, just as Gray had opened the door.

“Erza?” Gray questioned, opening the door just enough so that he could poke his head inside. He could hear her, but something wasn’t right. Not only could he not see her anywhere, but she was making a sound that resembled, that of someone crying. Gray opened the door all of the way and quickly stepped inside, closing it gently behind him. “Erza? Where are you?” He then asked, his voice softening and his eyes widening with disbelief.

“Down here…” He heard her say and cautiously he made his way in the direction of her voice. It seemed to be coming from behind her desk. He approached slowly, until he finally spotted her sitting on the floor, with her knees up. Her back was leaned up against the back wall, of the room.

“Well… Looks like you caught me…” She uttered up to Gray in a weak voice, her eyes were very swollen from both tears and exhaustion, as she looked up at him.

Gray was staring down at her completely startled. This was the last thing he had ever expected to find. Never in his life, had he ever heard of Erza crying, let alone seen it. He had always admired her strength and resolve, but to see her so weak and defeated was a bit of a shock, to say the least. She of course, still looked “I-I’m sorry…” He uttered pathetically, a hand going to the back of his head awkwardly. He glanced around the room uncomfortably, avoiding eye contact. He had no idea what to say and he didn’t know if he should just leave or stay. He actually felt like running away, but he couldn’t bring himself to just leave her alone like this.

“It’s okay…” She answered looking away from him and leaning her head against the wall. Her eyes closed for a few seconds. “I suppose, somebody had too…” There was a pause as Gray finally looked to her again, swallowing nervously. “At least it was you… I can accept that.” Gray let out a small breath of relief at her words. He was slowly coming closer to her. His steps very cautious and it caused Erza to smile beautifully up at him, her expression gentle. “It’s okay… I’m not going to bite you…” She spoke, her voice light and Gray couldn’t help, but smile back in return. He was lowering himself onto the floor, across from where she was sitting. An attempt to get on her level, so subconsciously she could still feel strong, like she normally always was.

“Well good… But I’m never too sure…” Gray joked and Erza laughed softly at that, she sniffled a little and then looked back at him appreciatively.

“Well thank you for not being too scared to sit near me right now… It’s nice to have a friend.” Gray shook his head, smiling back, as he took in her red cheeks and bloodshot eyes.

“It’s nothing… Really.” Erza tilted her head, taking in his appearance for a few seconds. He was sitting with both arms wrapped around his knees. Finally, she chose to ask him the question she had been wondering since he had walked in.

“Why did you come…? You weren’t working today…” Gray glanced down at her question.

“No, I wasn’t but I, uh… I caught the news…” Gray explained.

“Oh yea?” Erza asked.

“Yea and I um… Had some questions…” Gray then added.

“I see…” Erza replied.

“Yea… About Jose-” Gray started, but Erza was interrupting him with a raspy voice and a nod of her head.
“He tried to kill Banaboster last night…” She finished, still nodding.

“So, he did-?!” Gray spat. His volume rising in alarm, but Erza was still nodding her head.

“He sent Aria to do the job, but my informant and I were there, waiting for him. We tried to stop him…” Erza explained.

“You were?! Gray exclaimed. “And it worked… right?! He isn’t dead!” Erza nodded again.

“You are right… He isn’t, but we may have done more harm than good…” Erza explained. “We were trying to bust Aria on an attempted murder charge, but Jose turned it around on me. He somehow got that drunk idiot Banaboster, to lie for him… Now he is making it look like the police were trying to arrest a hero… As if Aria was the one saving Banaboster from the real murderer… Jellal Fernandez… And not the one who was actually trying to commit the murder…”

“Oh…” Gray paused, contemplating the information Erza had just spilled onto him, about the night before. “But…” He began, as something had occurred to him. “Where did this Jellal Fernandez come from? I mean… I know I’ve heard of the guy… He was a wanted felon… But if I am remembering it correctly… It was for robbery, not murder. His name just seems out of left field… Like why would he try and kill Banaboster…?”

“Gray…” Gray glanced up at Erza. She matched eyes with him. “Jellal was the one, who saved Banaboster from Aria. He was the person who working with me at the casino… He is my…” She paused, looking away from him. “He is my informant.” And Gray sat back at that, his eyes locked to Erza’s face, as she closed her eyes. He noticed a new tear was streaming down her cheek and suddenly, he understood… This man Jellal, was more than just her informant.

“He… He was shot right…?” Gray then asked, almost too afraid to continue, but he did. “Is… Is he dead…?” He questioned her carefully. “Jellal Fernandez?” He then added tentatively, fearful of upsetting her further by asking. Erza’s eyes remained closed, and her head stayed planted against the wall.

“I don’t know…” She answered plainly, her nose sniffling.

“I understand…” Gray answered. “I’m… I’m so sorry Erza…”

“Don’t be… It was my fault this happened… I should not have agreed to do the mission without more help…” She moaned, her eyes opening. “Now I owe Jose an apology on behalf of the whole police force, even though this is all my doing…”

“I saw that…” Gray spoke. “And actually… That’s the other reason why I’m here.” Erza finally looked back to him, her brow lowering with confusion, before Gray could continue.

“That women… Juvia… Jose’s attorney, who demanded the apology. I… I met her before… Before I knew, who she was. Before I knew she worked for Jose.” Erza was shifting her position at this news, her eyes widening with wonder as Gray spoke. Her interest was clearly piqued and so he matched eyes with her.

“How…?” Erza’s head was shaking with confusion, as she asked him this.

“There was this strange incident at the other station, while I was there for the Celestial Night Club case… One of the officers who works there, was being assaulted by a very large and scary looking man, just outside of it, and I arrested him… I didn’t make a big deal about it, at the time, because the guy just ended up being released on a technicality…”
“Wait... What?” Erza asked a bit flabbergasted and Gray nodded.

“Yea... The whole thing was very frustrating... But that woman... Juvia Lockser, was her name... She was the scary guy’s attorney too…” Erza was leaning forwards some at this news, her eyes squinting and so Gray continued, gaining energy as he spoke. “And it was so weird, because she just... Showed up! Without anyone even calling her or anything…! Almost as if she just knew, where to be already…! But then shortly after arriving, she left for the longest time and didn’t even come back, until after the guy was already released! And I only know that, because I followed the big guy out and watched him get into a cab with her! It was the weirdest fucking thing, I swear!”

“Who was this man?” Erza then demanded, her voice regaining its strength.

“Ga- something...” Gray shook his head. “I don’t remember his first name.” He then spoke. “But his last name was Redfox.” Erza’s brow lowered at the name. She brought a hand up to her chin.

“Redfox... Why do I...?” She started, glancing up to try and remember something. “Why do I feel like I’ve heard that name somewhere before? Somewhere important.” She pondered.

“I know right!?” Gray exclaimed. “I thought the same thing!”

“No... Jose doesn’t have anyone on record under the name Redfox, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a connection... We already know there must be something with this Juvia woman...” Erza stated.

“Yes! Thank you! That’s what I’ve been thinking... And that’s why I’m here! I think I could talk to Juvia...” Gray spoke, his voice lowering near the end of the sentence.

“Who...?” Erza questioned.

“Yea!” Gray exclaimed.

“But doesn’t she know, you are a cop already?” Erza then asked.

“Well yea, but-”

“Then why would she talk to you, Gray?” Erza asked trying to make him see reason. “I think you are just getting, too excited.”

“No, no, hear me out...” Gray explained, looking down. “You don’t understand... When I first met her, I got this feeling like... Like she was a good person... And that, she wanted to connect with me.” Erza’s eyes narrowed on Gray, after hearing that. Her hands were going to her hips, in a motherly way. She glanced away from him, with a roll of her eyes. “No! I’m being serious!” Gray explained. “I think I could befriend her, maybe...”

“I think what you mean to say, is... Get the girl to fall for you and then get her to spill her guts. Am I right?” Erza then asked and Gray could only shrug.

“Well, I mean... If it gets the job done... Right?” He muttered and Erza had to fold her arms at his words.

“I don’t know Gray... Basically what you are requesting from me is, permission to pursue an undercover mission, when the suspect in question, already knows you are a cop... Do you hear how stupid that sounds? Not only that... But it’s not exactly morally right, either... Although... I’m not sure, I really care at this point, seeing as this woman is the one demanding an apology from me... On
Jose’s behalf… On live television… And in front of the whole city.”

“See then!” Gray snapped. “All the more reason, to let me do it…!” He then added enthusiastically.

Erza paused, considering the plan he was suggesting. Her mind was melting at the moment. She was too exhausted, upset and worried, to be completely level headed, like she normally would be in any situation. In truth, she knew this was not the right time for her to make a rash decision, but that was exactly the reason why she was beginning to feel herself swing in the direction of Gray’s plan, anyways.

She was angry. Jellal might be dead and Jose needed to pay for what he had done. She knew she wasn’t being rational, and that her judgement wasn’t sound, considering where her head was at the moment, but… Any possible way, to make Jose and his men go down, no matter how farfetched it actually was, was sounding pretty good to her, right about now.

“If I let you do this… You need to understand the risk you will be taking…” Erza finally spoke. “This plan of yours, automatically puts you more in the line of fire, than ever before.” She explained.

“I know.” Gray answered, but Erza was shaking her head.

“No, you don’t.” Erza snapped firmly, thinking of herself and everything Jose had found out about her past. “I don’t mean it, in the way that I normally do. Where you are a cop, in the line of, live gunfire… If you think there is a high risk of dying in that scenario, then just know, that this one is much worse… If Jose finds out who you are and what you are doing… He will destroy you, Gray… Makarov and I, cannot protect your identity from him… And so, you absolutely CANNOT, let him find out about you…!” She explained. “Up until now… You, Natsu and everybody else, with exception of the headmaster, Mira and myself, have been fighting Jose from behind a veil that keeps you all safe… Because he doesn’t know who you guys are… He just knows, that he has enemies who are fighting him…” Erza’s brow was lowering. “Now, trying to conduct a plan like this, will require you to step out from behind that veil… You risk exposure now… Do you understand? If he figures out, that you are one of his enemies from behind the veil, he will use the people you love, against you… Before ultimately killing you… Do you understand what I am telling you?” Erza then asked, in her deep captain voice.

“Erza…” Gray addressed her gently. “Jose has already taken everything away from me… I have nothing else…” He spoke softly.

“Your life…” Erza stated coldly.

“That isn’t a good enough reason, for me not to try…” Gray answered. “At least, if I try and do this… And I am able to find out even one thing, we can use against him… Then I won’t feel like I am useless anymore… I’m tired of just sitting on the side lines, watching you and Natsu do everything…” Gray clenched his fist. “I need to do this. This is the mission Ur left for me. It is the only thing that gives my life meaning… I need to know that I am making my parents proud.”

Erza glanced down at that, her arms folding. She took in his words with sorrow, before matching eyes with him again.

“Okay…” She replied with a nod at him. “Then I agree to it… But for now,… Keep this between us, until the next meeting… There is a lot, going on right now.”

“Understood.” Gray answered with a nod, a small smile creeping onto his lips. “Thanks captain. I am going to take my leave now.” He spoke, pointing to the door behind him with his thumb. They were back to being captain and subordinate and Gray was anxious to begin the next step.
“That’s fine… Go and enjoy the rest of your day off.” She spoke and Gray smiled at her, before turning to head towards the door. He stopped once his hand was touching the handle.

“Oh… And captain…” Erza glanced up at Gray as he turned his head to look at her, with a gentle smile. “You better get home too. You look exhausted. And… I’m pretty sure that there’s nothing more you can do here, right now.” He paused, choosing his words carefully. “If you don’t… I’ll be forced to tell everyone what I found in here, today.”

Erza couldn’t fight the weak smile, that was coming over her face at his words. He was right, she was absolutely exhausted. She did need to go home, and she really couldn’t do anything more, than what she already had.

“Don’t worry Gray. I will… And… Thank you…” Her voice was weakening again. Gray glanced up at her, he could see the shine in her eyes, as she spoke. She was truly appreciative of his support. He sent her one last smile before, opening the door and stepping out of the room.

No Erza… Thank you… He smirked to himself, thinking of Juvia and what he had planned to do next.

She couldn’t stop reading it over and over again. It was a text message, one she had received late the night before, from her father, Jude Heartfilia. At the moment of its arrival Lucy had been on the phone, talking with Loke for an extended period of time. Trying her hardest not to worry or think about, what her father had to say about how she was living her life. Today though, as she stared at the threatening black letters, pasted over the florescent background of her phone screen. She knew she needed to deal with it, even if she didn’t know how she was going to, just yet.

Minutes had gone by, as she continued to stare at the blinking cursor in question. Her fingers were rested over her chin and lips in thought. Her eyelids were lowered, and her gaze was fixated on the phone that was sitting on top of an open book, laid out in front of her on the tabletop. She was seated somewhere within the confines of the school’s library. There, with the purpose of getting some research done, but to say it wasn’t going well was an understatement. Her current disposition was clearly showing how troubled and unable to concentrate she was, as she began to chew on her one finger nail. Completely unaware that she was being watched by two raven colored eyes, from across the table.

Natsu and Lisanna had opted to tag along with the blond after spotting her, on her way to the library during a lull period in the day. Now the three of them sat together at a round oak table, in the near heart of the library. Surrounded by busy students and various sizes of books and shelves.

Natsu and Lisanna were seated on one side of the table, while Lucy was alone on the other. Lisanna was busy working on a paper, writing an outline of sorts with a book open in front of her. She kept looking up to reference the page she was reading, before going back to the paper to jot down some notes. Natsu had an open notebook in front of him, but there was nothing written on the page he was turned too. Instead there was only a small pen doodle of a smiling cat, with wings and a note underneath it that said, ‘be happy’, written on it. His focus was too stuck on Lucy to get anything more done.

His one pink eyebrow had lifted up in perplexity, as he continued to monitor the blonde’s clearly anxious composure, from across the table. A library wasn’t normally a place where Natsu would choose to spend his downtime, between classes. He was more of a gym guy, or even better, a cafeteria guy. But right now, Lucy had him worried enough by the way she had been acting, to hold
off on sustaining his stomach, just this once. He was sure that whatever was bothering her, had something to do with her dad, but he knew better than to ask when there was someone more than just the two of them, around.

His eyes shifted over to the flaxen haired girl beside him. Lisanna had her hair tied up into two small, low hanging ponytails. She was wearing a pair of earbuds in her ears, the cord to which was going down into the neckline of her shirt. Natsu could hear the faint sound of whatever it was, that she was listening too, as he watched her bangs fall over her face. Her head was bending low over the page she had been writing on. He stared at her persistently, until she stopped writing and glanced up at him, feeling his eyes over her.

“What is it?” She asked quietly, meeting his gaze. She was pulling an earbud away from her ear. “You okay?” She then asked, noting the strange look on his face.

Natsu’s mouth stretched into a wide frown, his eyelids lowering as he angled his head in the direction of Lucy. Lisanna lifted her head and glanced over in Lucy’s direction. Finally taking notice of what the girl across from them, was actually doing. Which appeared to be nothing, but staring at her phone. The blonde’s deadpanned expression was giving her away, though. Whatever it was, that had her glaring at the small device, was clearly not good by just about any onlooker’s standards.

Lisanna turned her sights back to Natsu, her one eyebrow going up in question. Lisanna was not particularly close to Lucy, but they were still friends. Lisanna at least knew the blond well enough, to know that Lucy was normally very studious. She was not the type of girl, to just sit there and have a staring contest with her phone all afternoon. Especially in a library of all places, because she loved to read books.

Natsu carelessly shrugged his shoulders at his girlfriend. A sign to let Lisanna know that, he did not yet know what was bothering Lucy at the moment. Her navy eyes went from his, back to Lucy’s and then his again. A silent question, to which Natsu smiled too in return and then nodded. Lisanna returned the gesture and then bit her bottom lip, turning back to face the blond in question. She closed the book and notebook she had, had in front of her and began to push her chair back to stand up.

The sound of the chair moving across the shallow carpeting, finally garnered them some attention from the blond, as Lucy nearly jumped at the loudness of it. Her eyes were darting up, as she flew back in her chair and looked up at Lisanna clearly alarmed. Lisanna was standing now, her hands on the table as she looked to Lucy.

“Okay guys! Turns out I have somewhere I need to be! Almost forgot! So happy studying!” She announced, picking up her book and the notebook, as well as her shoulder bag.

“Oh, okay!” Lucy replied, “Well, have fun!” Lisanna smiled at the blond, before turning back towards Natsu.

“And you… Make sure you get some actual work done.” She scolded gently and Natsu just laughed, pointing to the notebook in front of him with a pen.

“By the next time you see me, I will have mastered my artistry of cats!” He jested.

“Mm-hmm sure…” Lisanna replied, bending over him, as he still sat in his chair. She kissed him on the corner of his forehead, before looking back to Lucy, who was already looking back down at her phone and ignoring them both again. “Now…” Lisanna spoke, her eyes gesturing towards Lucy once more, before she turned away. “See ya later!” She finished with a wave, walking away.
“Bye.” Natsu returned, watching her go, before finally turning back around to face Lucy.

He watched her for a few minutes, her hand had moved up to her forehead, as she leaned on her elbow for support and continued to stare down at the phone in front of her. Her teeth had now graduated from chewing on her nail, to her lower lip as she paid him next to no mind. Natsu’s eyes shifted down to the notebook in front of him, an idea forming in his head and he smirked.

Lucy was bringing her one hand up, her finger going down towards the letters on the phone screen. She was thinking, she may have finally had an idea on how to start the text message she would be sending back to her father. Her intention being to tell him, that she had already come this far by herself. And that, she had always intended on seeing her degree through at Makarov’s school, no matter what he thought or did about it. Or no matter how much it hurt her, that he didn’t support her, or her dream.

“Yea... Something along those lines...” She was muttering quietly to herself. She had typed about two letters, when something light and made of paper suddenly hit her in the forehead.

Lucy froze, as the paper ball proceeded to fall and land right in front of her, bouncing off of the phone screen she had just been typing on. Her eyes very slowly, moved up from the ball to the culprit who was sitting right across from her. Natsu made no words in response to the pointed glare Lucy was now sending him. All he did was very slowly, tear another piece of paper from his notebook. Lucy watched him, her head lifting and her eyebrows lowering with annoyance as Natsu gave her a cheeky smile in return.

“What the hell are you doing?” She finally asked, unimpressed.

“Oh... Do I finally have your attention?” Natsu asked, crumbling up the second ball of paper and throwing it at her. It sailed through the air, heading right towards Lucy’s face, but she quickly, bat it away in aggravation as it came near. It then went flying in another direction, to the next table over. A few kids looked up in question, as it landed right in the middle of where they were sitting. Natsu was staring at where it had landed with amazement.

“Whoaa... Good shot!” He exclaimed impressed, receiving a shush from an anonymous person somewhere in the library. “Oh, shut up!” Natsu responded, turning back around in his chair to face Lucy.

“Seriously!?” Lucy questioned him with an angry, but quiet voice. “How old are you? What do you want!?” Natsu pointed to the phone in front of her.

“I want to know why, you are staring at your phone, like that.” Natsu answered bluntly, causing Lucy’s eyebrows to lower in aggravation.

“Like what!?” She asked incredulously and with an exaggerated shrug.

“Like this!” Natsu chimed, pushing his face down to his own drawing, so that his nose was touching it.

“Ha, Ha real funny!” Lucy responded, sitting back in her chair.

“Well?” Natsu then asked, after picking his head back up. His eyebrows lowered and his face grew more serious. “What’s going on with you, Lucy?”

“It’s nothing for you to worry about...” She muttered, her shoulders hitting the back of her chair, as
she crossed her arms.

“Oh c’mon!” Natsu replied. “Since when do you not tell me?” He then asked.

“You’ve got your own things going on.” Lucy answered flatly, her head turning and her eyes looking elsewhere in the room, out of discomfort. “You don’t need to worry about my problems too…” Natsu leaned his face forwards at this. His eyes were digging deep into the side of Lucy’s face, as she kept her head turned away from him. Doing her best to ignore his blatantly obvious stare.

“But I asked…” He stated, folding his arms. “So that means, I want to know.” Lucy kept her head turned, but she couldn’t help but spare him a small glance with her eyes. Her cheeks were turning pink from the pressure he was putting on her and, because of her feelings for him. She glanced away, quickly trying to come up with something on the spot, because in truth, she didn’t want to keep relying on Natsu like she always had in the past.

“It’s- It’s about a date, okay!” She finally answered. Natsu lifted his head up quickly at that and sat back in his chair.

“A date?” He questioned clearly perplexed, his one eyebrow was going up with the words.

“Y-Yes… So ya see! I didn’t really feel like talking to you, about it!” She uttered, a bit nervously. Clearly not the greatest at lying, as she still could not bring herself to look at him.

“With who?” He then asked, still sounding confused.

“Uhhh…” Lucy’s mouth opened. Her eyes were widening, as she realized what she had just done. Oh shit… Do I need to tell him about Loke now…?

She brought a fist down onto her own head in frustration, furious at herself for the excuse she had just come up with. Me and my big mouth… Her head lowered and her eyes closed as she exhaled a tiny sigh. Well… I Guess… He was going to find out one way or another, right…? Oh well… She opened her eyes, her brow lowering as she looked up at Natsu. He was staring at her with wide curious looking eyes, his arms still crossed and his brow high with surprise and expectancy. Here it goes… Came Lucy’s last thought, before speaking again.

“You don’t know him…”

“Oh!” Natsu chimed.

“He lives on the other side of town.” Lucy then added.

“Oh, I see!” Natsu responded, his voice full of understanding.

“He’s an attorney… And he is very, very nice.”

“Oh okay, well that’s good then.”

“Yes… I like him… He’s… Good looking.” Lucy explained, relaxing the more she spoke.

“Well I guess that’s a plus!” Natsu exclaimed, a smile forming on his face. One Lucy could not help, but return.

“Yea…” She sighed blissfully, her cheeks reddening as her shoulders hit the back of her chair again. She felt at ease suddenly, like a large weight had been lifted from her shoulders after finally telling Natsu about Loke. And she couldn’t help, but swoon just a little bit, when she thought of their time
together. Like the morning when Loke had made her a homemade breakfast, after spending the night in her apartment. “He’s really been… Well… Sweet…” She spoke, her eyes averting upwards.

“Well good. Because you know what happens if he isn’t, right?” Natsu suddenly asked, gaining Lucy’s eyes back on him, as he smirked at her. He clenched a fist at her. “I get ta beat him up!” He announced and Lucy could not stop the genuine grin, from forming on her face at Natsu’s familiar antics. It felt good to have his support, no matter which way she spun it. She glanced down, her eyes feeling a bit glossy as for some reason, she seemed a bit more moved than she had expected by him.

“Aw thanks Natsu… But hopefully it won’t come to that.” She replied glancing down modestly at the table.

That same smile was still on her face. Either way, it was good to know that Natsu had always intended on having her back, if some other guy other than himself, did end up breaking her heart. Of course… It isn’t his fault, that he doesn’t know, he already did that a long time ago… Lucy’s eyelids lowered with the thought. Natsu was watching her, his head tilting in question, but somebody was approaching their table before he could ask what Lucy was thinking about.

“Excuse me?” A girl’s voice spoke up. Lucy glanced up to see a short girl with long flowing chocolate locks, tied up into twin tails and two red bows. Her face was heart shaped and her bangs hung in thick, scattered strands above her forehead. Her eyes were a warm golden brown, as they matched Lucy’s. Her expression was a bit nervous, as she did a small double take from Natsu to Lucy again. “Are you uh… By chance, Lucy Heartfilia?” She questioned, a bit unsure of herself. Her hands were wringing together with uncertainty.

“Oh…” Lucy replied, looking to Natsu again. “Well that’s- That’s kind of strange right?” She then asked, glancing to the girl again.

“The headmaster needs to see you in his office, right away!” The girl answered, her voice a bit shaky.

“Oh…” Lucy replied, looking to Natsu again. “Well that’s- That’s kind of strange right?” She then questioned, more to Natsu than to the girl. “Is something wrong?” Lucy then asked, slowly leaning forwards in her seat, so she could push her chair out and stand up. She looked back to the girl in wait of a reply.

“I honestly don’t know, sorry! I was just told to come find you and then send you to his office!” The girl explained.

“Oh… Well, okay then…” Lucy answered, grabbing her phone and closing the book in front of her. “Well, I’ll go there then… Right now.” She replied, just as Natsu stood up too.

“I’m going too.” Lucy looked to Natsu in question, but to say some small part of her was not relieved by his company, would be a lie.

“Uhh… I don’t know if that is allowed!” The girl spoke, but Natsu just looked to her with a serious expression over his face.

“Trust me, it is…” Natsu looked back to Lucy, as he continued to speak. “Let’s just say gramps and I know each other very well…” He winked at her, and it earned him a smile from the blond. “Welp… Come on Lucy.” He spoke, picking up his notebook and shoving it into the backpack he had on the back of his chair. “Let’s go…” Lucy nodded and the girl left them, trusting the two of them to go where they needed too.
They gathered up their things and headed out of the library. Making their way into the cold air, through the campus, towards the building that housed Makarov’s office. Once they had gone inside the building and were aboard the fancy elevator that headed up to his office floor; Lucy found herself becoming very nervous. Natsu could read the expression, clear as day on her face.

They were both quiet, up until the doors opened and they made their way into the fancy hallway that led a straight to Makarov’s door, which was currently closed at the moment. Natsu was walking in front of Lucy, his backpack draped over one shoulder. Lucy was practically dragging her feet along the lush carpeting. Natsu turned to face her, as he noticed her taking entirely too long to reach the end of the hallway.

“Don’t worry.” Her told her, trying to smile. Lucy’s head was down, her eyes on the floor. “It will be fine… Gramps isn’t all that mean, really…”

“It’s not that…” Lucy explained. “I just… I just have this bad feeling… That this has something to do with my father…”

“Why do you say that…?” Natsu then asked and Lucy finally matched eyes with him.

“Because he threatened me last night, by saying he had already begun to take, ‘action’. And that if I wanted to put a stop to it, then I would need to drop out of this school right away… Whatever that means…” Natsu whipped back around to face the door, his anger apparent.

“Yea… We’ll see bout’ that…” He growled, before bringing his fist down hard, on the wood. It made a very loud pounding sound, that echoed throughout the small hallway. “We’re here old man! Let us in!” He suddenly shouted.

“Natsu!” Lucy scolded in embarrassed outrage.

“Then just come in already!” Came Makarov’s grouchy voice from the other side. Natsu forced open the large double doors and stepped inside. “What do you want, you pain in the ass?!” Makarov shouted from his chair, behind the large desk.

“I’m the pain in the ass?” Natsu spoke, as Lucy slowly stepped forwards, into the room behind Natsu. “You’re the one summoning my friend, into your office and making her worry for no god damn reason!” Natsu snapped, pointing to Lucy, who was waving his hand away and telling him to quiet down and that it was fine.

“I have a very good reason for bringing her up here! Seriously boy! Use your head, once and a while!” Makarov scolded, causing Natsu to just stand there and fold his arms like a disgruntled customer at a store.

“Oh yea? Then what is it?!” Natsu demanded, patience not exactly being his strong suit. Makarov was looking to the blond, as she stepped forwards.

“Keep your mouth shut Natsu!” Makarov snapped, before finally clearing his throat. “Lucy.” He finally addressed.

“Yes sir…” Lucy replied, her voice soft.

“I’m sorry to have worried you. You have done nothing wrong child… And so… I hope that helps to ease you somewhat, after I tell you what this about…” Lucy looked down at her hands at that. Her face was starting to flush red. She instantly knew she had been right. Her father had done something
and she could feel herself wanting to get upset.

“It’s okay sir…” Lucy answered. “I think I already know what this is about.” Makarov’s eyebrows stretched back in surprise, after hearing this. “My father…” Lucy stated and then there was a few seconds of silence, until Makarov finally cleared his raspy throat. The small old man was bringing his hands together on the desk and looking down at them in shame.

“I am truly sorry… But you are correct…” Natsu could only watch in silence. Anger fueling him from the inside out, as he could see how upset Lucy was becoming. Her hands came apart and her arms stretched down to her sides in defeat.

“Could you please tell me… What has he done…?” Lucy then asked, her head hanging low enough, that her blond hair had swung down in front of her face, partially masking her.

“All he has done so far, is made threats to me personally, as well as the school. His hope is that I kick you out from the institution.” Makarov explained. Natsu’s one hand was forming into a tight shaking fist, after hearing that. He could not comprehend what kind of father, would do that to their own daughter. “I don’t know much about Jude Heartfilia, other than that, he is a very wealthy and powerful man… Your family owns the Heartfilia railroads, is that correct?” Makarov then asked

“It is sir.” Lucy answered, her voice low. Makarov brought a hand to his chin.

“A man like that, may very well be capable of causing us some kind of hardship… For certain… But will he carry through with any of his threats? He is your father, child… Do you have any idea…?” Makarov then asked. Lucy’s fists were shaking at her sides. Natsu was watching her, he could make out one tear coming down her face.

“I-I don’t know sir…”

“I see…” Makarov answered, his eyes closing as Lucy began to cry. Both Natsu and Makarov could hear her beginning to sniffle.

Lucy was bringing both hands up to her face, to try and stifle a sob that she could feel building in her throat, but it was of no use. She was already choking on it. She was not only ashamed and embarrassed, but losing all hope of her ability, to ever escape her father’s control on her life. She could feel her knees growing weak, as the tears flowed down her cheeks. She was going to fall to the floor, but suddenly a warm hand on her shoulder, stopped her. steadying her balance, keeping her on her feet.

“Well, make no mistake, Miss Heartfilia.” Came the strong voice of Makarov, echoing throughout the room, as Lucy glanced up to see Natsu standing right beside her with an encouraging smile. His calm gaze was settled over her red, and tear stained face. Her mouth was falling open, as she looked to him, wanting so badly to thank him for holding her up, but not being able to find her voice. Makarov’s speaking continued, bringing a strong presence with it, as it reverberated against the walls in the room.

“Well, I do take your father’s threats very seriously! I have no intention of adhering to them!” Came the old man’s words, firm and unmoving.

Lucy could feel her wobbly legs causing her to lean into Natsu, at this news. He wrapped both arms around her, to keep her up on her feet. His face just above hers. The old man’s expression was fierce and his brow was angled down in determination, once Lucy got a look at it. She had to duck her
head, another sob choking out of her, as she was moved by them both.

“Do you understand me, Miss Heartfilia?” Makarov then asked.

“Yes...!” She managed to gasp out, before Natsu’s hand brought her head to his chest for comfort.

“I will not be removing you from this institution. So, I suggest you plan on finishing your degree as you have been, these past three years…! And with honors, no doubt!” Makarov announced.

“I will!” Lucy sobbed out between tears, as Natsu eased his embrace on her and laughed.

“Ya hear that gramps!” Natsu chimed. “She ain’t goin’ anywhere!” Natsu exclaimed. “Because she belongs with us!” He finished and all Lucy could do was sniff up the rest of her tears, in Natsu’s half embrace.

Gajeel was waiting in the cold, just outside of Levy’s apartment building. He was standing along the curve by the street, his head angled up towards the sky. His skin soaking up any bit of warmth, the sun’s rays had to offer him. His injured leg was bent slightly at the knee, his weight strategically balanced over the other one without the stitches. Surprisingly enough, the pain in his thigh wasn’t all that severe at the moment, even though he was standing. Levy’s medicine seeming to have done the trick to help, or at least a little bit. Not for his shoulder though, nope, that still hurt like hell.

“C’mon man… What’s takin’ you so damn long…” Gajeel was muttering to himself, as he looked down at his own feet. The snow was turning gray with heavy amounts of water gathering inside of it. The blazing sunlight that afternoon, was already causing it to melt, but it was still cold. Gajeel wasn’t really wearing his jacket appropriately, either. He had learned the hard way, that putting on a coat with one arm in a sling, was a pretty difficult thing to do. Especially when the injury was still so fresh. After a few attempts, he had been forced to settle for just draping the jacket over his shoulders instead. Levy had been right, he hadn’t been prepared for how much harder even the simple things would be, with this kind of extensive injury.

His mind drifted back to their conversation. Her offer to aid him with his recovery and how he had discouraged her from the idea, for the many obvious reasons. Clearly, he hadn’t really wanted to do that, but what was he supposed to have done? Continue to drag the poor girl down into the mud, with him? Gajeel could feel the muscles in his bad shoulder, tensing back up in retort to the internal question. His teeth clamped down, as he reached for the spot of pain with his free arm, his hand settling over the sling. How was he going to get through this by himself though? He couldn’t even put on his damn coat.

You’d probably come up with any excuse you could, to accept her offer... Gajeel could hear a voice in his head saying.

“Yea... Because, I’m selfish...” Gajeel spoke out loud in response. He was remembering Levy’s face, in the moments that she had told him that he, ‘hated himself’. He was then closing his eyes, cringing at the memory of her voice once she had said those words and, because of the pain in his stupid shoulder.

And, because... You love her... Came a voice from inside his mind, that was not his own. Gajeel’s eyes opened wide, he could picture the grinning face of his father, looking down upon him. A true monster has no love, Gajeel...

Gajeel could feel his teeth crunching together with the statement, his fangs were prominent as he
continued to bite down. His eyelids were slamming down tight again. He was now, bringing his free hand up to his face, pinching the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger in distress.

*What do you know about love, old man...?*! His thoughts were raging. *You left! And now here I am...!* He could see himself now, screaming the words at his father. *I don’t... I don’t deserve this! I know I don’t... I don’t deserve her!* But the old man was just throwing his head back in laughter at him. Gajeel could see the image of himself falling to his knees, before his laughing father. Then Metalicana’s head came down, his silver eyes matching Gajeel’s red ones, like smeared blood on steel. He was grinning Gajeel’s same smile, his fangs protruding.

*We’ll see...* Was all he said, and then Gajeel’s eyes were snapping open as the sound of an engine roaring, was suddenly apparent. There, parked right in front of the curve, but still running, was a very recognizable truck with a large flatbed tower, hooked to the back of it. Gajeel’s sights were directed up in shock, as he realized he hadn’t even noticed it approach. There at the front, the driver’s side door was opening and out popped a very familiar face. The person was standing up, hanging out the open truck door and looking at Gajeel from above it.

He was a very large man, built bigger than the truck he was driving, with more muscle mass than Gajeel himself. His skin was a very dark tone, far darker than Gajeel’s. His hair was black and almost nonexistent as he had a very short, military buzz cut. His brow was prominent, much like Gajeel’s, but he had thick expressive eyebrows over his large eyes. His cheeks were full and his nose wide, but not overly large. His chin was a nicely shaped square, with a well kempt goatee. The most noticeable feature about his face though, was the large skin torn scar, over the right-hand corner of his right eye.

“Yo! Gajeel!” Came the man’s powerfully deep voice in greeting. Seemingly happy to see Gajeel, but his face almost immediately fell, once he got a real gander at his old friend. “Whoa... What the hell happened to you?” He then asked, true concern reaching his voice and Gajeel could not fight a smirk.

“Ah, you know me!” Gajeel hollered up at his friend from the ground. “Can’t stay out of trouble, but don’t you dare, worry yerself over me, Lily! It ain’t anythin’!” The man named Lily laughed boisterously in response to Gajeel’s antics.

“Sounds about right!” He added, “Now get up here, you criminal!” He called, gesturing with the entirety of his whole right arm. “We got a bike to go get!” He then announced and Gajeel laughed in response.

“Gi hi! You got it!” He replied, making his way towards the passenger’s side door of the truck.

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It had been twenty-four hours and Erza still hadn’t slept. Currently she was aboard the elevator to the floor she lived on. It had taken a bit of time and convincing from Elfman too, but she had finally agreed to take Gray’s original advice and go home for some rest, even though she didn’t feel good about it. Banaboster was about to be released from police custody. Aria had already checked himself out from Magnolia Medical and Jellal was nowhere to be found. Now she was supposed to write Jose an apology and read it to the whole entire city on live television, and there wasn’t anything more she could do.

Erza’s gaze shifted up just as the elevator dinged, signaling that she had arrived on the right floor. She could spot a clouded reflection of herself in the chrome of the steel doors. Her eyes looked baggy and bloodshot, pure exhaustion was exemplified upon her face. She stared at it with a frown, right up until the image split in half and revealed the hallway before her.
Erza stepped out of the elevator, her feet dragging their way down the hall, towards the entrance to her loft. Her body was mirroring the mindset she carried with the way she moved, as she approached the door. She dug out her key, unlocking the door and stepping inside of her home. The lights were off, but the room was not dark, thanks to the large bay window. She threw her things aside, carelessly. She needed to get some sleep, then once she did that, she could figure out what to do next… About everything.

She headed straight for her bedroom, sauntering down the hall on almost unsteady feet. Her long, now loose scarlet hair, drifting back and forth over her back, with each step she made. Once near the door, she finally noticed something was off, after already passing several other indications, she would have otherwise noticed if she wasn’t so tired and stressed.

It was open, just a crack, she could see the corner of the bed inside. She froze, her eyes stretching open and her body going rigid. She could feel her heart plummeting into the pit, that was her stomach, a chilling draft taking its place in her chest.

“Jellal!” She screeched his name like murder had become a sound. Her elbow slamming into the door, as she shoved her way inside of that room, like it might just disappear if she wasn’t fast enough. Her body stumbling beyond the threshold of the doorway and landing near the foot of the bed. She lifted up, her mouth open to take in the air and there he lay. His eyes closed. The beige bedcover soaked in a color darker than her hair. The stain was all around him.

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A/N: More Monster FYI's

Okay it’s been a while since I have done any of these and they are long. Only read if your heart desires too.

-The Random Girl in the library. - Was meant to be Zera, Mavis’s friend from Fairy Tail Zero and the end of Fairy Tail.

-Let’s talk about weather! - When I first started Monster it was fall, and fall also happens to be my favorite season. That is why I chose it for the beginning of the story. It also made sense, because fall is early into the school year and I wanted Levy to still have one more year of college to get through. Now you may be wondering why I chose to have it snow, if it is only supposed to be autumn. Well, where I live, this is not uncommon. We get snow in the fall, from time to time and sometimes even very late into the spring (Ever had a snowy Easter? I have…) So, it was basically an atmospheric choice, based on the mood of the current scenes and my own experiences from life. That, and it was also meant to be a throwback to Levy and Gajeel’s first meeting in the story, as that had been in December, with snow present. Full circle. A plus to this choice? Fall wardrobe is simply the best! So, stylish with coats and boots! And the weather is gorgeous, blue skies, sun, cool air and leaves changing. I love it.

- About Erza and Jellal!- A lot of people portray Erza as the more dominant of the two, when it come to this pairing, due to her overall commanding and strong presence. And well, I don’t think Erza is ever, by any means a *washboard*. I do however, believe that Jellal may be one of the only people, this normal rule of thumb does not apply too. Why? Because around Jellal, Erza has been known to show weakness, like in the Tower of Heaven arc, or even be flustered. Like at the end of the Christmas special. Erza is not like this around other people. She has had little to no issue being
naked around most everyone else. And although she has been shown, to still take action, when it concerns her emotions for Jellal, like almost confessing her feelings to him in the Oracion Seis arc, or trying to kiss him, in the Grand Magic Games Arc—She doesn’t necessarily go about it, with her usual gun-ho and overly confident attitude intact. It’s always more cautious and heartfelt, because there is a lot of naked emotions there. Jellal has also been seen nervous around Erza. Like in the OVA or in Mashimina’s illustrations of the two, but when Erza becomes a mess, he rises to the occasion. Again, at the end of the Christmas special— I honestly think his nervousness is more out of fear, for disrespecting Erza and less about actually being afraid or flustered by her. Erza is a strong woman and he respects her for that. He loves her for it, but let’s face it… We all know she has a deeply vulnerable and sometimes even child-like side as well. The armor metaphors in her story arc apply here and I applied them in my story as well, because it makes sense. Jellal is one of the people who knew her, before she put on that armor. Before she became Titania, the Queen of fairies and she wouldn’t have become that person without him in her life. These are all important aspects of their relationship and I wanted to bring them forth and touch on them in their love scene… And their past together is the ‘why’, that explains it all. ‘Why’ they are who they are, together and separately. How they wound up where they are. ‘Why’ they are so important to one another. Fairy Tail shows us all of that and so I wanted to mirror that in my own story and use it, as a weaving plot device, that will heighten the stakes for Gajeel and Levy’s story.

-Adding to Jerza- Jellal and Erza’s scene in the casino and the way they acted together in those scenes, were greatly inspired by the shows Castle and Full Metal Alchemist Brotherhood. When creating the blueprints for those scenes, I thought a lot about how Richard Castle and Kate Beckett would be, going undercover. I was going for a mix between them and Roy Mustang and Riza Hawkeye from FMA. I am pleased with how it turned out and honestly… I have my inspirations to thank for that.

-The mention of peppermint in chapter 13 Scent- Some of you may have noticed this, and yes, I will admit it flat out… This was an ode and reference to the animated movie, Anastasia, as it is one of my very favorites and I hold it dear in my heart, always. In the movie, it is the smell of peppermint that triggers a memory for Anya of her grandmother and for Levy, in my story, it does the same. Which is why, Levy was dreaming of a story, her grandmother used to read to her. The story that lead to her love of reading and books. Smells are often responsible for these types of events in real life. Thus, Gajeel has the same experience, in the beginning of the chapter. He smells the snow on Levy and it reminds him of the night he met her, because he recalled her smelling ‘wintery’ on that first night in the alleyway. As I mentioned at the end of that chapter, the ‘You smell like snow’ line was also a homage to my favorite soap opera couple, who greatly inspired the plot of this story. Monster is basically my baby and it pulls inspiration from all over… And as I write it, I think it is not only important to recognize that, but to honor it. After all, the purpose of creating art of any form is to entertain, inspire and elicit emotion and these fandoms have done that for me. Enough so, that I can set out and create something for others to enjoy and hopefully some of those people who read Monster, can set out and create something themselves as well… And so the chain continues… It is never ending.

-Levy’s crying scene- in the chapter Blood, after her dream. Well that was an unplanned moment. Although, I had wanted her to recount the trauma she had endured, I hadn’t intended for it to be quite as sad and lonely as it ended up being. During that time, I myself was personally lost. Fearful of losing my dad, after he had disappeared for an extended period of time, (then he ended up passing away some months later) I was constantly at a loss, just trying to figure out, how to handle a situation
I basically couldn’t do anything about anyways. Writing about a character who had lost all of her loving family, was an easy way for me to unload some of that pain I was feeling and dealing with, on an everyday basis through her. Levy has lost everyone, her parents and her grandparents and you can bet that those losses, play a huge roll into her character and have a lot to do with my characterizing of her. Even if it hasn’t all been revealed openly yet. In some ways Gajeel and her, are actually very alike in Monster when it comes to the extent of their loneliness… But Gajeel’s history is far darker, whereas Levy’s is just sad. Thus, making them into two very different individuals, with different mentalities about life. The intention is that Levy, is the symbol for life after loss and Gajeel is an example of what one sometimes needs to become, in order to survive a hard life… But he too, isn’t without hope… He just needs to learn that, and with Levy’s help he will be able too... And in turn, Gajeel will help Levy to see how strong she actually is and will help her conquer fear enough, that she can properly go after the things she wants to in life.

-Gajeel’s Resentments- Hopefully this was made clear in chapter 12 Blood, but in case there is some confusion… Gajeel hates his father, because he believes he was abandoned by him as a child. Left alone to endure cruelty and torture, and to fend for himself. These circumstances forced Gajeel to abandon the concept of love and other frail emotions, in order to keep himself in a more neutral state of numbness. His tolerance for pain was born this way and with the aid of torture, he himself even tested it through piercings and a lot of fighting, while growing up. Gajeel was able to keep going, by becoming the very definition of a Monster, as stated to him by his father. With nobody to care for, he had nothing to tie him down and pain became so much easier to endure. He was even convinced he had all, but beaten it, so he could never be controlled or helpless ever again. Though Gajeel deeply resents his father, he is also very subconsciously like him. He still channels his father’s lessons constantly, like a mantra that gives him strength. Despite being betrayed and very deeply hurt, his love for his father still shows in this way. Even if Gajeel doesn’t realize it. He believes himself to be a monster and that is why he never imagined Levy could actually hurt him, or that he could fall in love with her. I hope that all makes sense!

-Levy Dream- The two different Gajeel’s, Levy sees in her dream represent her knowledge and confusion about who Gajeel is to her. On one side, there is the Gajeel she first met who threatened her for standing up to him, in the name of protecting his victim. The very same, capable of beating a man’s face in. On the other end, there is the Gajeel who cracks stupid jokes and is brutally honest with her. The one whom she spent the night with. She sees them both and she is aware of them both, she is even sure to tell him of that, in her dream. Thibault represents the trauma Gajeel caused her. The fact that he repeated the ‘shh’ line to her, like when they were in the bathroom, that was Levy’s subconscious reminder, that she is sworn to secrecy about what she endured. Being assaulted and almost raped, that would be very difficult thing, for anyone. And lastly, Thibault’s face breaking right before her very eyes, was Levy’s brain reliving the horrid things that she was forced to see. Overall, the dream was meant to be about her eventually making a choice and whether or not, to let it be dictated by fear of what could happen, as most of Levy’s choices are made based on fear up until this point. That is one of her biggest insecurities in Monster.

-The Last Flashback- The idea was to bring their relationship full circle and explain why Levy was so unhappy to see Gajeel, when he first shows up at the club, in chapter 1 and 2. Her annoyance and anger, her fear when he manages to catch her hand. And why Gajeel somewhat believes, she might be interested in him, thus the, ‘you can’t stand that you want me’, line. This scene also served as a filler for a few important gaps of information, that Gajeel and Levy already knew about each other. I
had always intended on filling them… Like how Gajeel knew Levy was trying to become a doctor. It was also another foothold in the past, about how he taunts her for never having any fun, making more sense of the comment Levy makes to him when she says ‘you love to throw that word around in my face’ in chapter 5. It heightened why Levy is so conflicted about him, he has been very kind to her at times, but then he does very wrong things and she has witnessed them, personally. And lastly, it cemented why Gajeel believes that Levy is only helping him, because she is that good of a person… And not, because she has any special feelings for him. On two, no three, different occasions now, she has tried to intervene on other people’s behalf, because she didn’t want anyone to be hurt. She cares about people and she tries to do right by them, no matter how wrong or bad, said person might be, even when being afraid. Watching her be this way, makes Gajeel feel how wrong he is, when he does the things he normally does for work, without thinking. His guilt returns and it weighs on him, Levy makes him second guess his choices, so much so, that he even let a man go, at risk of his own safety, should his boss ever find out. Gajeel and Levy’s relationship is the whole point of this story and so I think it is important that their developments make sense and that is why scenes like this exist. We flash forwards from this scene about their past, back into the present and it becomes a shining example of their progress on an individual level and together, because of each other. Together they will continue to grow and develop.

-Gajeel’s words to Levy- about goals. He sees how dedicated she is and he admires her passion, but at the same time he sees how hard she is pushing herself… He thinks she might lose her way, while becoming lost and overcome with the goal, as he himself has been there. He was trying to tell her to enjoy life too. To stop and do something else she wants to do from time to time. Otherwise she might become resentful of the goal itself. By putting everything else on hold and working so hard that she is exhausted… What will she have once she is there? Will there be anyone to share it with? Can she even keep up the pace like she is, to reach it? She might lose herself in the process. What he says here, has actually, already started to happen to Levy in the beginning of the story. In chapter 1, Levy is already miserable. She is incredibly stressed out and lonely. She even precedes to tell this all to Lucy, starting the conversation with a joke about how a one-night stand, is the kind of stress reliever she might want. This is recurring, I went out of my way in the flashbacks, to show how busy Levy has been each and every year. All-nighters spent studying, stressful roommate situations, never having money, always working, the girl hardly ever has a minute and so of course, Gajeel has noticed. Not only that, but if you remember a certain shower scene after their one-night stand in chapter 9- That scene was meant to be the moment, that Levy realizes how bad it actually was becoming herself… As she recalls how good the one night was with Gajeel and how it made her actually feel alive again… She sees there, how she was starting to lose her way and question why she was working so hard with no relief to come anytime soon… She has nobody to lean on. Her family is gone, nobody to share the successes she is working towards with, outside of her friends, of course. I personally do not know what that is like, but I would imagine it would be extremely difficult to keep up the motivation and steam she has been, for four years like that- knowing there is still a longs ways to go, even after graduation. I think these lessons apply to life in general. Working hard is important, but doing things for yourself, that you just enjoy, is too. You need to allow yourself some freedom from time to time, when working towards something, because it rejuvenates you and keeps you strong and happy for the goal to come. Being with Gajeel, helped Levy in this way. She went after something she wanted even though she was afraid. She was able to open up to him on a physical and emotional level, which helped with her loneliness. ‘There are people in this world that enjoy being alone, but there isn’t a single person who can bear solitude.’ – Master Makarov to Gajeel.

Okay I think that should about do it. I wrote a lot, I like to hear myself talk (clearly). Thank you to anyone who took the time to read all of this. I try to put a lot of thought into many
aspects of this story. Sometimes I just spend all day locked inside my little head, planning and
recording things for future use... And you know what, there is just something fun about
sharing all of that, so that is why I chose to write these out. There might be more to come in
future chapters, but we shall see...God knows I have more than enough material in this damn
brain of mine. Until next time!

And one last note, the next chapter will be the very last full chapter I've written so updates
may slow down a lot once that one is posted, because the story will be caught up and nearing
its halfway point.

Thank you for reading and have a happy day!

Chapter End Notes

Look at what you've done
Stand still, falling away from me
When it takes so long
Fire's out, what do you want to be?

I'm holding on
Myself was never enough for me, gotta be so strong
There's a power in what you do
Now every other day I'll be watching you, Oh-Oh

Oh-Oh, I'll show you what it feels like
Now I'm on the outside

Oh-Oh, we did everything right
Now I'm on the outside

Oh-Oh, I'll show you what it feels like
Now I'm on the outside

Oh-Oh, we did everything right
Now I'm on the outside

Though you give me no reason
For me to stay close to you, tell me what lovers do
How are we still breathing?
It's never for us to choose, I'll be the strength in you

I'm holding on (I'm holding on)
Myself was never enough for me, gotta be so strong
There's a power in what you do
Now, every other day I'll be watching you, Oh-Oh

Oh-Oh, I'll show you what it feels like
Now I'm on the outside
Oh-Oh, we did everything right
Now I'm on the outside

Oh-Oh, I'll show you what it feels like
Now I'm on the outside
Oh-Oh, we did everything right
Now I'm on the outside

I'll show you what it feels like
Now I'm on the outside, I-I-I
I'll show you what it feels like, I-I-I-I

(Ah-Ah-Ah, Ah-Ah-Ah)
I'll show you what it feels like
Now I'm on the outside

(Ah-Ah-Ah, Ah-Ah-Ah)
We did everything right
Now I'm on the outside

“Outside” Calvin Harris & Ellie Goulding
I want you to be the one to handle this.” Came Jose’s voice, breaking through a series of worrisome thoughts and scenarios, that were currently going rampant in Juvia’s head.

“Huh?” She uttered, glancing up at her employer in question, as Jose had his steely eye zeroed in on her. Her two coworkers, Sol and the healing Aria, had also turned to look at her expectantly. The three of them were seated on the round side of Jose’s desk. Sitting within the confines of his dark office at the Shark Tank, surrounded by the blue glow of the aquarium. Juvia was positioned in the middle, directly across from Jose. Aria was sitting in the chair to her right and Sol was just beside her on the left.

Gajeel however, was still nowhere to be found. Juvia’s concern for her missing friend, along with her unease at being back in that ominous building without him, were making it a struggle for her to catch the majority of what they had been discussing. She had instead been too occupied with stealing glances back up at the large window of ocean, back dropped just behind her employer. The shift in lighting each and every time a large shark would glide into view, only serving to distract her further, in a complete state of apprehension.

“The apology.” Jose informed with a firmness that demanded her attention and came across like a warning for her to ignore the sharks. “I would like you to be the one to make arrangements with Erza Scarlet.” He explained and Juvia could only stare. “You are already the face of our request in the eyes of the public.” He cleared his throat before continuing. “And with your legal background, I find it unlikely that our lovely captain will question your motives, as she would any other members of the organization”

Juvia stared at Jose, her mind doing its best to escape worry and understand what he actually wanted from her. She would be the one, berating the police and their captain, until they finally moved to meet the ridiculous demands Jose had set for them.

“Now, how you choose to go about that is up to you.” Jose had continued after a pause, his eyes now going downwards, towards the desk. “Just get Miss Scarlett to relinquish…” He stated. “And I would like it done sooner, rather than later. In fact, they have until the end of this business week, to go live with it.” Jose explained, his eyes matching Juvia’s again and she finally nodded in response, swallowing back nervously as she did so.

“I understand sir.” She answered. “I will be sure to get in contact with the captain, right away.” Jose’s gaze stayed on Juvia. His stare unflinching, as always when he was demanding something.

“Be sure that you do.” He stated. “It would do more harm than good, for the Phantom Organization as a whole, if we end up needing to cut all affiliation with Magnolia’s police force.” He finally
looked away, and the muscles in Juvia’s chest were tightening up. “We would much rather continue our support, so as not to have the public questioning our morality.”

Juvia could feel her back going rigid at the hidden intensity of Jose’s words. They were a very subtle threat and that was not lost on her. She knew right then, that she would need to make sure, that the police… No, Erza Scarlet, whom Jose seemed to be particularly focused on, as he clearly had some kind of personal vendetta against her, would have that apology done and delivered by Friday to the evening press, or else it would be her own head on the line.

“Now, Aria…” Jose then addressed. The change of subject allowing Juvia to breathe out in relief, as she was thankful to no longer be the center of her employer’s attention. “You are to bring Banaboster Goodrich here. Schedule a meeting with him, escort him here if need be. I expect he will be willing to deal now, after having conflict with the police.” Aria only nodded in response. “Good, the sooner the better. I don’t want to give Makarov, or Titania for that matter, an inch’s more of room to budge. I would like to keep those two firmly planted, right in the same position I have them.” Then he looked to Sol. “Sol, I want you to sit in, on my meeting with Banaboster and advise as needed.”

“Oui monsieur.” And Jose just smiled in response and yet somehow, Juvia found the expression on his face to be very chilling. She knew the words he chose, were purposeful. Jose had a very particular way of doing business and he wasn’t about to shed any light on how he got things done, with his legal advisor sitting in the room.

“I expect him to be much more cooperative, at this point in the game. Willing to deal, or perhaps give up ownership of the Casino and its location on the docks altogether, just for a way out.” Sol returned Jose’s smile.

“After this meeting, I’m sure he will!” Sol announced, with a laugh that had Juvia looking the other way in discomfort.

“Yes…” Jose agreed, his small smile still intact. He then glanced down. “And now lastly, has anyone heard anything from Gajeel?” Juvia was staring at the hands she had cupped over her waist, at this. She could feel Jose’s eyes scale over all three of them, only to then land on her and so, she chose to finally answer without looking up.

“No word yet…” Juvia answered, her voice soft. There was a short pause, Juvia could feel the weight of that silence, drape over her. It was almost as dark, as the shadow that shifted over her face, from a gliding shark in the aquarium above them.

“Well that is fine…” Jose finally answered, after clearing his throat. Juvia shifted her eyes back up to look at him, unsure if he was being truthful. His expression seemed surprisingly neutral. “I have him assigned to his own project. One that might take a considerable amount of time…” He muttered, but Sol was frowning at this news. “That boy is efficient enough to know, that I don’t want him coming to me until he has something substantial.” Jose then dismissed, but Sol was speaking up, out of his great dislike for Gajeel.

“Pardon monsieur? But what is this, Gajeel has been tasked with…? Perhaps he is in need of a more… Experienced, hand.” Jose stole a narrowed eye glare at Sol, for speaking out of turn.

“I would appreciate your focus, on the task I have given you and not others… If he is in need of manpower, then he will have it upon request.” Jose hissed a bit coldly, clearly annoyed. Sol bowed his head in apology towards Jose.

“Oui monsieur. Then you shall have all of my attention.” Sol answered
“The next few steps we take from here, are very critical…” Jose explained, his voice growing in strength. “The project I have Gajeel working on, will hopefully keep the unknown adversary at bay, while we move forwards and arm ourselves, for the apparent enemies ahead.” He stood up.

“Makarov, and his queen of police” Jose sneered. “They are trying to deface us…” Jose explained, his hands slamming down onto the desk. Juvia jumped, startled by his sudden anger, before looking up at him with wide eyes. Another shark had appeared, swimming over Jose’s head like a halo. “But they lost the recent battle…” He continued, “And now we’re the ones doing the defacing! We must take advantage of this win… Now, that we have latched on… Let’s pull the rug right out from underneath Makarov’s feet!” At this, Aria had begun to cry.

“That poor old man!” He was blubbering. “He won’t have any idea!” He then whaled as Sol grinned and laughed.

“Oui monsieur! You can count on us! We shall not lose steam!” Juvia could only sit there and nod with great unease. Aware of Jose’s vendettas, but not of his intent and that, was what scared her the most.

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Please Jellal… Please…. Live!

Her words were faint, but he could hear them muffled, but not distant. Almost as if he were just underwater. Live…

I… I’m trying… He thought, but I can’t feel my body anymore… I’m sorry…

You can’t die! The words called back. I can’t lose you! He could not see her, but he knew she was nearby and so, his mind was able to fill in the blanks of her image. Starting with the deep scarlet color of her hair.

I want too… He answered. Only, because you want me too… He could see her face in his youth. All of those neutral expressions, the ones that hid a great deal of pain, for very many years. Her frowns and her heartbreaking tears. I… I don’t want to be the reason you cry… Then he could see her smile, hitting him like a warm breeze. Just as it had, the very first and last time he saw it. I’d like to see it again...

“Please Jellal! I can’t lose you!” Erza was shrieking, her body hanging over top of his on the bed, pressing down on the bleeding wound. Her skin covered in his blood. Her eyes red and raw, with the tears that were still leaking down her cheeks. The sob was escaping her throat as she hung over him. “God damn it!” Her shouts were echoing against the walls of her bedroom, the very pitch of frustration and she knew she was completely useless. “Somebody please help me!” She begged, her voice cracking with desperation and a knock on the front door answered her plea.
Erza jumped to her feet, her eyes looking to Jellal’s limp body like he was the very last thread of her existence.

“Please don’t die…” She begged, moving away from him, dizzy with heat and the heavy smell of blood. She could feel her body moving towards the door, but it was as if, she wasn’t even in it. She was instead watching from somewhere above the scene. Just a mere onlooker from the heavens, as she grabbed at the front door rather hysterically. Her arms opening and her fingers curling up like claws, completely covered in sticky red liquid and fingerprints.

The first person she came face to face with was a tall old woman, with red eyes and a deep frown memorialized by the wrinkles on her face. The woman at first made no movement, other than to shift her gaze and meet Erza’s saucer sized eyes, with an air of composure that seemed unattainable considering the current situation. Her expression stern, even though Erza had answered the door looking like the victim of a survivor-horror movie.

“Where.” Porlyusica demanded, not giving Erza a chance to breathe, but also not waiting for a response, before shoving past her rigid form to get inside. The old woman hardly listened, for the stutter that followed behind her, as she marched towards the only hallway that the loft had to offer.

“T-The-The last room on the right!” Erza was choking after the retreating form of Porlyusica, but her own voice sounded foreign to her. Two other people were making their way inside. A young girl, followed by Makarov, the two of them were following the old woman and Erza could only stand there, before the open doorway. That was until two arms were pulling her close and into a very tight embrace.

“It’s okay…” The voice spoke into her ear, causing Erza to suddenly gasp and push herself away in anger.

“Mira…?!” She exclaimed in shock. “No! How can you-!” Erza began, but Mira was slamming the door shut.

“Shh…” She spoke, her brow lowering. “We will save him.” Saying anything she could think of to keep Erza calm. Fearful that the neighbors may have heard the screams or caught sight of the red head, standing in the doorway, covered in blood.

“Mira…” Erza managed. “You don’t understand, he has lost so much blood… He’s been…” But Mira was grabbing at her again and pulling her close.

“Shh… Erza…” She soothed, wrapping her arms around her tightly, bringing Erza down some, so that her cheek was against the top of her head. “Shh” She stroked the back of her head. “We will save him… You need to believe that.”

Erza could feel her tense body shaking, the relief of getting a breath back inside of her body. Her eyes closed tightly, as she rested her head against Mira’s shoulder. Her arms still out and open, refusing to hug the girl back. What with, all of the blood still all over them. She shuttered, trying to hold onto the rhythm of breathing and how to do it properly.

“I will…” She managed with another small gasp, hot fresh tears spilling from her closed eyes as Mira, stroked her head once more. Mira’s own blue eyes were glossing over, as well, never having seen Erza at such a loss before. It hurt.

The car ride had been long and warm, a regular blanket of circulating air as the sound of the engine had long since lulled Gajeel to sleep. Lily was driving, his eyes glazed over and glued to the road
ahead, for the majority of the drive. The radio was turned off only, because he had noticed how exhausted Gajeel was. It had taken only mere, minutes for his friend to nod off in the passenger’s seat of his truck.

They had been driving for nearly an hour, fast approaching their destination with Gajeel’s bike in toe. Lily checked the rearview mirror, his eyes landing on the motorcycle strapped to the back of the truck, before shifting his gaze down towards Gajeel. He was slouched in his seat, leaning in such a way that his sling shoulder, was lower than the other. His free arm was stretched protectively over the injured one. His chin was resting against his own chest, his eyes were closed and his head was shaking back and forth gently, with the slight movements of the vehicle.

Lily frowned, his red eyes looking back towards the road again. He had many questions for Gajeel, but he knew it was not yet the time to ask them. He looked to his sleeping friend once again, this time taking note of the dried blood stains in his clothing, before he shifted his gaze away altogether. Silently observing and confirming the details for himself to remember. Lily was aware of the nature of Gajeel’s work and that was much of the reason why he knew how lightly to tread.

Several more minutes passed by, and Lily was breaking the car for a turn, finally having managed to make it home to his shop. He lived a good distance away from the city, out in a very rural area, where the roads were winding and full of hills. The ideal location for motorcycle riding, when the weather allowed for it. His house was also home to his small business, a bike and car body shop, that he had opened by himself.

They drove over the low bump of Lily’s large driveway, the small jolt stirring Gajeel enough, to open his eyes. Lily was smirking as he reached up to hit the button that opened the door to his first garage.

“Ughh… Musta dozed off…” Gajeel was muttering with a groan, his one hand running over his face and forehead.

“Yea, you took a little nap.” Lily spoke, the smile could be heard in his voice. Gajeel was looking up as the truck eased into a vast garage. The lights from above were coming on, one by one. Motion activated as they pulled into the vicinity of each one.

Gajeel was glancing around, inspecting the garage with tired eyes. There was a total of three vehicles, a truck and two cars that looked as if they were being worked on. One was on a lift, the other had a custom paint job that looked unfinished. Among the cars in the garage, there was also a line of motorcycles. The only one Gajeel could recognize though, was Lily’s familiar green one.

“Man…” He began, his voice lazy as he was still trying to regain his wit after the hours’ worth of rest. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been here…” Lily grinned and laughed a little in response, with a small nod.

“Yes, it has my friend. Yes, it has.” He agreed, still smiling as he positioned the truck and put it into park.

“How’s business been goin’ for ya, these days?” Gajeel then asked, slowly lifting himself from his slouched position with a groan. “From the looks of it… Seems like it’s goin’ good.” Gajeel offered, as Lily turned the key so that the engine finally hummed off.

“It is!” Lily exclaimed. “Real good!” He added. “So good even, I was thinking about hiring some help.” He spoke looking to Gajeel. “Or maybe a partner would do…” He then added slyly and Gajeel could only return the smile his friend was sending him and shake his head. Meanwhile Lily was looking at him with one of his thick eyebrows arched in clear implication.
“Yea… Yea… I can take a hint…” Gajeel replied as Lily was opening the driver’s side door. “Ya know I can’t…” Gajeel then added, reaching for his own door and kicking the passenger’s side open, as Lily had walked around to meet him from the other side. Lily just grinned and stood aside, as Gajeel slowly hopped his way down from the truck and onto his feet, his face cringing with the landing.

“I know.” He offered, “But hey, the minute you do need some work… I’m here for ya…” Gajeel’s cringe was fading back into a smirk.

“I’ll keep that in mind…” He answered.

“You better.” Lily replied, his hand reaching for Gajeel’s good shoulder. “Now come on. Mi casa es su casa.” He stated, resting a hand on Gajeel’s back and patting it with the strength of longtime friends. Gajeel glanced down nodding, pulling out his phone from the jacket he had draped over his free arm. They began to walk together for a moment, Lily letting him go as they headed towards the door to the house.

“Well do you think you can find me a charger for this thing?” He then asked and Lily took it from his hand, before reaching for the handle of the door and opening it. Gajeel stepped inside the threshold of the house. Lily hung back with the door open, examining the phone in one hand as he brought it up to his face, before hitting a button on the cinder wall that closed the garage door. He then followed Gajeel inside, handing the phone back to him, and hitting a light switch on the wall.

A total of three lamps had turned on, along with a ceiling light positioned above a desk, to illuminate the first room. It was made to look like a lobby, there was the front door and then an added section of drywall to keep it separated from the rest of the house. A television and some comfortable looking chairs and a small loveseat couch positioned around a coffee table with some magazines on top. A television mounted on the wall and a phone on the desk. There were some file cabinets tucked back behind the desk. Gajeel stepped a little further inside, his heavy boots thudding against the wooden floor until he reached the rug where the couches and table were.

“Might take some fishing around, but I think I might have something for you…” Lily answered walking towards the desk and stepping behind it. Gajeel turned to watch, as Lily sat down at the chair behind the desk and began to open desk drawers, in search for the cord in question. After a few minutes, of looking and Gajeel pacing around the small room, he managed to pull something out.

“Okay…” He spoke up, interrupting the silence as he stood up, holding a cord. “Think I found something that may work.” Gajeel turned to look at Lily and then handed him his phone, as he approached. Lily stuck the smaller end of the cord into the charging port of Gajeel’s phone. “Looks like it fits, hopefully it charges.”

“Yea we won’t know until the damn thing turns on again… It’s way dead.” Gajeel spoke and Lily just smiled.

“Well c’mon, let’s plug it in somewhere.” Lily suggested as he marched towards the small open doorway that lead to the kitchen. Gajeel followed suit, though a little slower than Lily, because of his leg. The kitchen was a long open space with the fridge to the right, on the other side of the wall. The counters were lining both sides with the exception of where the oven was in the middle on the left side. Once they walked through the kitchen, the room opened up to a small dining room, with a round table and the wall just behind it. To the right, the rest of the room opened up to Lily’s actual living room. A much larger couch and a loveseat were situated in the room, around another coffee table and entertainment stand, with another television. The stairs were against the far back wall of that room, to the right of where Gajeel and Lily were currently standing. The wall to the left only had a set of sliding glass doors that lead to outside and a small laundry room, tucked away beside the
kitchen, through a door.

Lily was walking up to what looked like another small desk area along the wall in front of them. It was full of stacks of mail, a corded business phone and various desk items, with a wheeled computer chair placed in front of it.

“Right here.” Lily was speaking as he bent down to plug the assumed phone charger, into a power strip located just underneath the small table. He then set the plugged-in phone down, on top of the surface of the desk. “Guess we’ll see if it comes to life in a bit, yea?” He then asked looking to Gajeel who was still standing in the threshold of the kitchen. Gajeel was reaching up, touching the back of his neck.

“Yea… I guess…” He was saying. “Say man… Can I use yer shower to clean up..?” Lily folded his arms.

“I was hoping you’d ask, looks like you could use it.”

“Is that yer nice way of tellin’ me I smell?” Gajeel then asked, with a smirk and Lily could only laugh, his body bending with it.

“Looks like you caught me…” He joked with a grin, flashing his brilliant white teeth. “You just look a mess.” He then added, gesturing towards him as his arms unfolded. “And actually… Do you have any clean clothes?” Lily then asked, eyeing the blood on Gajeel’s pants, before matching Gajeel’s face again.

“Uh… No… If you have some I could borrow though...” And Lily again just laughed.

“Yea no problem!” He announced turning around and walking between the couch and square coffee table. “Have a seat actually.” He gestured towards the couch with a turn back towards Gajeel as he kept walking. “I’ll grab you some. I figured you could spend the night here, then tomorrow I’ll drop you off at your place. And we’ll just leave your bike here with me, in the meantime.”

“Yea, all that sounds great…” Gajeel answered, his smirk disappearing. “Really, thanks man… Yer a life saver…” He then added, his eyes going downcast. He was bringing his free hand up to the back of his mane again, as he spoke and Lily could see from his uncomfortable body language, that he truly meant it. He knew Gajeel hated asking others for help, so he’d make it as easy as possible for him, by just offering it in place of him having to ask for what he needed.

“No worries Gajeel.” Lily replied with another reassuring smile, before turning all the way back around and heading up towards the stairs.

Gajeel watched Lily trot up the stairs of his house with haste, before stepping forwards into the living room and glancing around the space. It had been a while since he had laid eyes on the state of this room and things were a bit different than he had remembered. For one thing, the house looked much more well put together, since the last time he had been there. The colors were warmer, as though Lily had painted and added some slight décor since then. The majority of Lily’s furniture had been updated and were significantly nicer as well, clearly showing how well-established he had become over the years. His hard work having more than paid off, as he had vastly improved his home overall, that much was clear.

Gajeel was casually pacing around, his eyes examining the different photos hanging on the walls. One set in particular, in the middle of the back wall, was calling his attention. It was a large portrait
of a much younger Lily, clad in sophisticated army attire. Gajeel could not fight the slight smirk that was creeping over his lips upon inspecting it. Beside that photo, there was a much longer photo with a bunch of men posed outside, wearing camouflage uniforms and holstered with guns. Gajeel searched over the many faces in the picture, until he could recognize that of his old friend’s, standing, of course, in the back, due to his height. He again had to smile with pride. Lily was one of the only men he knew, who was both larger in girth and in height than himself, aside from Aria, who was more wide, than he was toned or muscular.

“Yo!” Lily called from the stairs with a grin as he came marching down, the noise causing Gajeel to turn around. He then tossed Gajeel some sweat pants, which Gajeel caught with his one arm, followed by a white tank top undershirt and then lastly, a bath towel. “Nice.” He smirked as Gajeel managed to catch the last article of clothing over his arm. He made it down the stairs and stood there, his hands going to his hips, in two fists. “Figured you could use my bed if you want.” Gajeel immediately had to shake his head at this, knowing full well, that Lily only had one bedroom in his house.

“Nah, no way. I ain’t kickin’ you out of yer own room. I’ll just sleep down here…” Lily frowned at that, folding his arms, the muscles of his forearms looking alarmingly apparent, as he did so. “Besides… The less stairs I have to deal with…” He spoke, tapping his bad leg. “The better.” And Lily could only nod in understanding, another small smile appearing over his face.

“Fair enough.” Lily answered. “Well, why don’t you go shower and I’ll grab you some blankets and pillows that you can use down here.” Lily suggested his thumb pointing to the stairs just behind himself.

“Yea, sounds good.” Gajeel nodded, with a smirk, edging his way towards the steps. Lily stood aside, pausing some as he watched Gajeel, limp his way forwards and reach the first step. He then had to cringe a bit, as he watched Gajeel lean a bit heavily on the railing to drag his way up the first two stairs.

“You going to make it Gajeel?” He questioned. “Do you need a hand?” Gajeel was waving an arm behind himself, in dismissal of Lily’s concerns though.

“No… I’m fine. I got this.” He answered without pause, slowly making his way up.

“No…” Lily answered, his voice light with acceptance and his face still cringing some, as he watched Gajeel make slow progress. Thankfully it was only one flight and the bathroom wasn’t far. Lily turned away, heading towards the small laundry room.

A short amount of time passed without disturbance. Lily had managed to set up a nice make shift bed for Gajeel on the long couch. He had laid out a clean bedspread overtop of the cushions, along with a few extra bed pillows. He had chosen to throw his couch pillows, in the laundry room. He was preparing to wash them, for once Gajeel’s shower was over, until a very loud sound suddenly gave him pause to stop. It had sounded an awful lot like Gajeel, shouting.

Lily froze, listening again and there it was, a distant shout of his name, in Gajeel’s voice from all of the way upstairs. He immediately dashed out of the laundry room upon understanding, hastily marching towards the stairs. Gajeel’s voice becoming clearer as he neared the source.

“Lily!”

“Gajeel!?!” Lily called back, by the foot of the stairs, not yet going up. “I hear you! What’s going
on?! You alright?!” He asked, worried, but unsure if he should run upstairs.

“Yea! I mean! Well…” Gajeel’s voice drifted off. “Kind of…!” He was saying, still loudly, but not quite screaming like he had been. Lily’s brow lowered at this in confusion.

“Uh… Okay?!” His voice was questioning. “Well did you need something?” He asked, now wondering if he was out of toilet paper or something.

“Well yea!” Gajeel answered, sounding a bit annoyed. “I just-I can’t-…!” Lily stood there, perplexity still evident over his features as he listened to his friend’s unsure voice. “I can’t get my damn pants off!” Lily’s eyes opened wide at hearing that, a few seconds of absorption, followed by a bit of a smirk.

“What was that Gajeel, I don’t think I heard right?!” He then called, in jest and Gajeel immediately answered back.

"You heard me, you prick! I need help!” And Lily could not help, but laugh at that, animatedly moving up the stairs and heading towards the bathroom. He came over towards the closed door, still grinning at Gajeel’s expense. He knocked, before opening.

"You decent?” He then asked. “Cause I’d prefer not, to be scarred for life.” He then added.

"Ha… That’s fucking hilarious! just open the damn door!” Gajeel barked from the other side and so Lily did.

Inside Gajeel was standing there with his sling off, but his shirt half over his arm and his jeans unzipped and unbuttoned, but still on. His belt was also undone and hanging loose. His boots and sock and were off, and in the corner. He looked to Lily with his brow low in frustration.

“I can’t pull my jeans down. And don’t you say a fuckin’ word.” Lily managed to withhold his laughter though it was difficult as he approached.

“I won’t…” He chimed. “This isn’t funny… Nope not one bit.” He choked as Gajeel’s fierce glare, blazed into him. “How bout this… I’ll get them started, then you just shimmy the rest of the way out? Ey?” Lily then suggested, coming near and Gajeel rolled his head up towards the ceiling with annoyance.

“Fine…” He stated, dragging out the word, clearly irritated.

“You better be wearing underwear…” Lily then spoke, approaching Gajeel’s side as he stood facing Lily’s sink and mirror.

“I am!” Gajeel raged back.

“Okay, I’m a pull from the side… Ya know, from your belt loops. Less awkward that way…” Lily then explained, still trying not to laugh.

“Whatever! Just do it! Yer makin’ it worst by talkin’!” Gajeel snapped and Lily again had to bite down, to keep from laughing as he lowered himself towards Gajeel’s waistline, grabbing onto the belt loops of his pants.

“Ehh… It’s fine… Now stand still.” Lily demanded. Gajeel planted his feet and Lily began to pull, and with a little bit of shimmying he was able to bring Gajeel’s pants down to knee level, before standing up quickly with hands up, like he was being arrested. “You got the rest…?” He then asked, and Gajeel rolled his eyes with a sigh.
“Yea… I can do it…” He stated, lifting his one foot out, as he balanced with a hand on the sink.

“You need yer self a woman to help with this, Gajeel.” Lily joked, a grin coming over his face, but the response he got back from his friend, was not what he expected. Gajeel glanced up, meeting his eye, before quickly shifting his stare away again, only to stare at the ground. His gaze growing distant, as a deep frown pulled at his lips.

“Uh…” He then began in response, clearing his throat with a small exhale of breath.

“Yea…” He then answered, his voice unusually soft. Still refusing to meet Lily’s eye again.

Lily stood there a bit put off by the peculiar exchange, his brow pushing together in confusion. He looked to Gajeel for a few seconds, taking note of the bandages on his leg and then going to his forlorn expression. Gajeel had managed to kick completely free of his jeans and was pushing them aside with his foot.

“Well…” Lily began, glancing away. “I’ll leave you to it then. Let me know if ya need something else…”

“Yea, let’s hope not.” Gajeel answered, his face cringing as he tried like hell to keep his bad arm in place and peel the shirt off of it. Lily turned away, walking out and closing the door behind him, so that Gajeel could have his privacy again. He couldn’t help but pause though, once out in the hall. His eyes going down to the carpeting on the floor and scanning over it in question. What had happened and why did Gajeel seem so off?

Nightfall had finally settled over the city, leaving the sky a gleaming sheen of cobalt. Levy had just stepped out from the entrance of the school’s library, after having to work another closing shift. She was locking up the front door to the building, with a key ring she had been given specifically for work. She turned away once it was done, securing the keys in the pocket of her coat, before making her way through the campus, to get home.

After cutting through one of the school’s large courtyards, she took to the sidewalks for some much-needed light in the fading day. The streetlamps were already buzzing with life, each one lining a path of orange, over the damp and slushy concrete. It had warmed up significantly, though wearing a coat was still advised. Levy didn’t feel as though she needed to have it zipped up. The snow was melting quite a bit, leaving much of the streets and sidewalks wet, but for the most part, clear. The grassy areas of campus had been reduced to makeshift swamps, home to mud and water alike. Levy found herself often transfixed by the reflections of light, within each various puddle she would pass by. Her mind inevitably elsewhere, as to be expected after everything she had been dealing with, as of late.

She shifted her gaze upwards, taking in the silhouette of towers and buildings in the distance, back dropped over a haze of darkening blue. She could just make out some slight details of their shape and the windows, but for the most part, they were overcast in shadow. She thought of Gajeel and the look on his face, after she had hugged him goodbye and then walked away. It seemed to be a constant. That image, haunting her throughout the day. Leaving her with an inherited feeling of dread and emptiness alongside it. Why couldn’t anything concerning him just be easy, for once?

Levy shook her head in denial, her gaze narrowing back onto the ground in front of her. She wasn’t ready to come to terms with it just yet. The acceptance of her feelings for him and the consequences that may result, but she could at least be honest with herself about one part. She had most certainly wanted him to stay.

“Levy!” Came a voice, calling from behind and stopping Levy in her tracks. Levy turned around, only to see Lucy trotting down the sidewalk towards her. “Wait up!” She called, fast approaching
and Levy smiled.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going anywhere.” She called back, just as Lucy slowed down, appearing just in front of her. “Well, besides home that is…” She then added, after second guessing her response. Lucy’s cheeks were rosy as she smiled back at her friend, taking in a small huff of air to catch her breath.

“Hey!” She greeted a bit winded and adjusting the purse over her shoulder.

“Hi!” Levy returned.

“Mind if I join you part ways?” The blond then asked.

“Not at all, in fact I’d like that. I could use the company.” Levy then replied, thinking she could benefit from the distraction. The two girls both turned back towards the path ahead, taking it in slow stride. A subtle peace settling between them, as they both contemplated their day and what to say about it.

“So…” It was finally Lucy who spoke. Earning Levy’s eyes, as she herself stared at the moving ground in front of them. “How’s it going?” She then asked softly, almost cautiously. Levy glanced away, looking back in front of her, her head lifting some. A small breath that could not be heard, left her as she closed her eyes for merely half a second in frustration. Her desire to speak to Lucy about everything that had been happening, being put aside for the greater purpose of protecting Gajeel’s identity.

“Well…” She began opening her eyes. “I’m very, very tired.” She then answered, having no more information to expel, that wouldn’t be some kind of lie.

“Another long night, then?” Lucy inquired, finally glancing over to Levy’s face and noticing the bags under her eyes. “That’s the second time… I kind of thought, after yesterday, that you would have gotten some actual rest.” Levy hung her head at Lucy’s words, her eyelids lowering.

“Yea… Me too.” She answered truthfully. “But nope. Guess not.” Lucy lifted a questioning blond eyebrow, but Levy continued to stare off. Making it a point, to not notice. “How about you…?” She then asked, aiming for a change in subject, as she glanced at Lucy.

“Uh… Could be better…” Lucy responded, looking forwards again and Levy frowned. Her head ducked some, to get a better look at Lucy’s face.

“Why? What happened?” She asked, her concern apparent.

“My dad, that’s what.” Lucy answered, catching Levy’s eye and watching as the girl’s mouth opened without her speaking. “He just won’t quit…” She paused looking ahead again, her head bowing and she closed her eyes. “He even called and threatened the school.” And Levy’s jaw went slack after hearing that, her eyes widening. She dropped a heavy hand onto Lucy’s shoulder and they both stopped walking for a moment, as Lucy turned to face her, her eyes open again.

“What?! That’s ridiculous Lucy! For what reason?!” Levy exclaimed, clearly alarmed, but Lucy could only frown.

“For the same reasons, he always harasses me about…” She answered, her eyelids lowering as she glanced down in shame. “He was hoping the headmaster would kick me out of the school…” Levy was still staring at Lucy with her mouth hanging open and absolutely, nothing to say. “It didn’t work… But… He hasn’t actually gone through with anything yet… All he has done so far, is made demands.” She finished, finally glancing back up to meet Levy’s eye at the end. They both paused
for a few brief seconds, Levy’s mouth closed as she took it in.

“I…” She began, suddenly feeling deep sympathy for her best friend. “I’m so so sorry Lucy…” She replied having no idea what more to offer, aside from that. It all felt so useless. Lucy’s eyes shined, but she kept her composure, despite how much her father’s actions seemed to hurt her.

“What are you apologizing for…?” She then asked, her voice a bit thick. “It isn’t as if this is your fault in any way…” Lucy finished, but Levy was shaking her head and glancing down.

“No… But…” She brought a hand to her forehead, resting it over the bandage. “I’ve been so… I don’t know… Preoccupied lately… I had no idea…” She met Lucy’s eyes again. “I should have been there for you… I’m really sorry.” But Lucy only scoffed and shook her head, glancing away. Once again, keeping her cool, but her nose and cheeks seemed to have reddened. She was clearly becoming a bit undone and trying not to cry.

“This just happened today, Levy…” She replied, her voice a bit rattled. “So please…” She glanced back up to Levy’s face, a small smile appearing despite the unshed tears that had gathered in her eyes. “Don’t worry… You are always around, when I need you… Like right now.” Levy returned the smile, her own eyes shining just a bit and then Lucy turned away, wiping at her face as a tear had fallen loose. She took a small haggard breath before speaking, “Ugh…! Come on…! Let’s just keep going…” She chimed, her voice unusually high from the start of her tears, as she took a step.

“Okay…” Levy answered, still smiling and looking down as Levy followed her, quickly catching up and matching the blonde’s stride. “So…” Levy then began, once they were in sync. “Makarov obviously has no intentions of kicking you out.” Lucy sniffed a bit, her eyes staying forwards on the path ahead.

“No…” She answered wiping at her eyes again. “He told me, he expected me to stay and finish my degree here, with honors…” Lucy glanced down. “Natsu was there too…” She then added softly.

“Oh really?” Levy then asked. “So then, he knows… I’m sure that is comforting, to you…” Lucy’s arms were folding into each other, almost as if she were cold, as she kept her sights on the ground.

“It is…” She answered, a bit tensely. “Despite how much I would like it not to be.” Levy watched her for a moment, taking in her body language, before choosing to speak.

“You know it’s okay, Lucy…” She finally spoke, catching an unsure glance back from the blond. “Natsu cares about you… And he may always have a place in your heart… You don’t have to try and completely shut him out…” Levy then finished, looking away, her eyelids had lowered, as she said this. She appeared to be deep in thought, as there was a small pause. Lucy had glanced away from Levy and was looking ahead again.

“Maybe… It’s just… I want to try and see where things go with Loke… I’m supposed to go out with him again this coming Friday after school… But you see, I’m worried. I’m worried that my feelings for Natsu will get in the way of me starting something else new with somebody else.”

“I don’t believe in ‘meant to be’s.’” Levy finally stated, her voice a bit firm and Lucy straightened up at this bit of news. Her arms unfolding as she looked to Levy who was looking strongly ahead.

“You don’t?” Lucy then asked in confusion, thinking her friend was a romantic, much like herself. After all, they did both enjoy reading those type of books.

“No…” Levy glanced down her eyes narrowing. “I believe in the feeling… You know, like the feeling that something is just… Well… Right. And that sometimes… There is just good timing…
You know, like the kind of timing that allows you to meet somebody… Maybe cross paths with them on more than one occasion, even if it doesn’t always work out… But most importantly… I believe in the choice. We may not have a choice in who we are attracted too, or what feelings we have for somebody… But we can choose how we act upon those feelings… And lastly, how we carry on, while bearing them.” Levy paused, her eyelids lowering. “Or… That is what I have come to believe at least…” She finished her voice softening as she looked to her fingers, that seemed to be fiddling together. Lucy glanced away from Levy with wonder, her eyes narrowing, as she stared up at the buildings in the distance.

“Hm…” She responded. “Well… I think that is pretty profound, Lev…” And Levy smiled.

“It’s okay, Lucy… I won’t take your fairytale endings away from you…” Levy replied slyly.

“No, no, it’s fine.” Lucy answered, swatting Levy away. “I get it… You’re a realist now… I don’t know how you ever tricked me.” And Levy could only laugh.

“I think maybe… I had myself fooled there too… For a long time…” Levy answered, looking up to the sky with a serene smile planted over her face. Its color had darkened significantly, small specks of stars were beginning to appear. Lucy was watching Levy, a bit of curiosity stirring her, as she noticed Levy’s calm and somehow blissful demeanor.

“Oh… Well, what’s changed?” She asked and Levy brought her head back down and looked to Lucy with a blank expression over her face.

The realization had been there. Everything she had just spoken to Lucy about, had been in relation to her own experiences with Gajeel and so, once again, she found herself in a corner. She couldn’t say anything.

“I suppose…” She began, unsure of what to say and so she came up with the simplest answer she could, in the moment. “I have.” It may have not even been a lie.

Gajeel was standing before the desk in Lily’s living room, his hair damp and a towel draped over his neck. He was clad in the sweat pants and white tank top, that Lily had let him borrow. His arm was back to being secured in its sling. He was staring down at the now revived phone in his hand.

Lily was currently elsewhere, most likely upstairs in his bedroom, but Gajeel wasn’t entirely sure. He was just thankful for the loose fit of the sweat pants and the wide span of the armholes in the wife beater, as they had both been pretty easy for him to slide into, without help. He hadn’t wanted to deal with another awkward situation like earlier that evening.

“Fuck…” He cursed lowly, under his breath. His large thumb was scrolling down the long list of missed calls on his phone screen. “Juvia…” He spoke, knowing he needed to call her back right away, but not wishing too. He knew she was going to be pissed. “Aw well…” He sighed, bending his neck in the opposite way of his sling arm, until it cracked. “Better get this over with…” He finished, hitting the button and bringing the phone up to his ear. It only rang one time, before the sound of Juvia’s shrill yells invaded his ear.

"Where the hell have you been?!!” She was demanding on the other end, barely taking a pause to breath. “I have been trying to call you ALL DAY!”

“Uhh…” Gajeel groaned. “My phone was dead.” He finally answered.
“Seriously Gajeel?! You better not have done anything stupid…!” Gajeel’s eyes were shifting up towards the ceiling, his mind recalling the fight with Natsu, followed by the ordeal with Levy.

“Depends on what ya consider, stupid.” He retorted thoughtfully.

“I’m not even going to pretend, like I know what any of that means. Did you listen to my message?!” Gajeel could only scratch his cheek, completely clueless as to what had gotten into her.

“No…” He answered and then he heard Juvia sigh on the other end, clearly exasperated with him.

“Oh my god…” She began under her breath, before becoming loud again. “Aria was stabbed last night!”

“What…? What the hell? How?!” Gajeel finally managed, his disbelief apparent. He had never heard of anyone getting the jump on Aria before. He was a very large and powerful man, with strong killer instincts.

“YEA!” Juvia exclaimed, in agreed shock. “He’s alive though! And well actually… He’s fine, really… And Jose somehow managed to get the police in trouble for arresting Aria, after he was supposedly being called, a hero… A criminal named Jellal Fernandez was the one responsible for stabbing him… This ‘Jellal’ man, was apparently trying to kill Banaboster last night, but Aria was able to interfere and he got stabbed in Banaboster’s place. I guess Aria, also managed to shoot this, ‘Jellal’ guy… But they don’t know if he is alive or dead, because he was able to get away, somehow. All they found was a lot of his blood, at the scene of the crime.”

“Wait, wait, wait… Hold on… Back up.” Gajeel demanded, she was hurting his head with all of this crazy information. “Did you just say Aria saved somebody…? And that was why he was stabbed?” Gajeel then asked.

“Yes.” Juvia answered.

“No.” Gajeel automatically replied. “None of that makes any sense. Especially if we are talkin’ bout Banaboster Goodrich. Jose wants that guy dead. I’m sure of it.”

“Well, that’s what happened.” Juvia answered. “And the police attempted, to pin it on Aria… Even though, he was injured and trying to save Banaboster… And now that, Banaboster told them it was actually Jellal Fernandez, and his blood was found at the crime scene, they were forced to let Aria go and Jose is now demanding an apology from the police. Which by the way… That is apparently my job! To make sure they do it, by Friday!”

“What the fuck?” Gajeel exclaimed.

“I know right?!” Juvia was hollering back, on the other line.

“Jellal Fernandez…” Gajeel was saying the name. “No…” He shook his head suddenly. “There is no way… Aria was the one, tryin’ ta kill Banaboster. He had to be. Nothin’ else makes sense.”

“Oh, are we being straight forward about that, now…?” Juvia questioned, her tone clearly sarcastic.

“I don’t know how not ta be, in this situation.” He stated. “I don’t even know who this Jellal Fernandez guy is.”

“He is a wanted criminal. He did some prison time for high theft… As far as I know though, his past wasn’t violent, or at least he wasn’t arrested for anything violent.”
“Yea… Well… I don’t know why that guy’s blood was there, but I’m sure Aria was the one tryin’ to end Banaboster, last night.”

“It doesn’t even matter now…” Juvia sighed on the other end. “I just needed you to know what was going on… Somehow I knew, you would be in the dark, even though the press have been all over this story… You’ve made me very worried, these last few hours… I hope you know that… I even went by your loft and you weren’t there. Where the heck are you, right now?” Juvia asked.

“I’m with Lily, at his place… I got into some trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?” Juvia then asked and Gajeel glanced down at his sling, with a frown.

“Don’t worry bout it…” He answered, not wanting to deal with her hysterics over the phone, about an injury she couldn’t even see. “I’m okay now. Jose had me tryin’ to figure out who caused the fire, cause I thought I might have a lead… I was doin’ a stakeout for just over twenty-four hours, I think… And that is why my phone died. Couldn’t get it to a charger, until I came here a bit ago.”

“Okay…” Juvia seemed to accept this answer. “So, what happened to the lead?” She then asked and Gajeel audibly groaned.

“Not gonna lie… It isn’t good…” He paused. “Turns out my thinkin’ was dead on with who it was, but… The guy got away from me. Trouble kinda bred from there…” He explained. “Jose’s gonna have my head if I tell him that…” He then spoke. “He was already pretty pissed… Doubt he’d forgive me a second time…” Gajeel finished somberly.

“Actually…” Juvia began. “I wouldn’t worry about it too much, Gajeel. Jose is actually, in a really good mood right now. This whole thing with the police has him looking like a kid, before Christmas… Not only that, but he seems to be particularly faithful in you… It seems like he doesn’t mind waiting, so long as you bring him something worth his while… So… I think you have some time to figure things out… I mean, at least until I get this apology thing taken care of, if not longer.”

Gajeel listened, with a frown still cemented over his lips. What Juvia didn’t understand was that, the ‘worthwhile thing’ she was referring too, would very likely end up being a human being, that Gajeel would end up turning into Jose. The Salamander to be specific, as that had been the order Jose had demanded. Bring him to the Shark Tank. Gajeel closed his eyes, choosing not to divulge this bit of information to her.

“Okay…” He answered. “That’s at least, a bit reassuring ta hear… Now, how bout yourself? Ya think, you can do what Jose’s askin’ of you..?” Gajeel questioned, his concern shifting towards her.

“Well, I had better right?” Juvia answered with a question of her own.

“Don’t worry…” Gajeel offered, trying his best to sound adamant. “He won’t do nothin’ to you, Juvia…”

“Don’t say that Gajeel.” She paused, her voice had been drenched in urgency. “I’m not stupid… And it isn’t like you to be naïve, or to tiptoe around my feelings.”

“No. What I meant was, I would never let him.” Gajeel reaffirmed assuredly.

“Well, that is very kind of you Gajeel, but you cannot protect me for, forever.” She paused, before continuing. “We are not kids anymore…”

“No, definitely not…” He answered looking at the photos of Lily once more, as he had drifted around the room slowly while being on the phone. There was a small pause between them as they
both thought about their past, and the positions they currently found themselves in now. “You’ll get it done rain woman… You’ve come a long way… I know you can do this.”

“Thank you, Gajeel… You’re right… I know I can do it, too.”

“Listen… I’ll be back in the city tomorrow… At home. And ya should be able to get hold of me from there… So ya ain’t gotta worry anymore.”

“Okay, good… Tell Lily, I give him my thanks for looking out for you.” And Gajeel smirked at that.

“Sure, no problem.”

“Goodbye Gajeel.”

“Goodbye.” Gajeel replied, pulling the phone away from his face at long last. He looked down at it and hung up, before staring at the black screen for a few seconds. He couldn’t help, but think and worry about Juvia’s reaction, once she got a look at his current condition. She was sure to be royally pissed at him, for leaving her in the dark about it and that wasn’t something he was looking forward to dealing with. He brought the phone up to his forehead, pressing it into his skin with frustration.

“Was that Juvia…?” Came Lily’s voice, as Gajeel dropped the phone away from his face and snapped his head around, to look at his pajama clad friend, standing at the foot of the stairs.

“Uhh yea…” He answered turning around fully, his eyes shifting around the ground. “Guess she’s been tryin’ to reach me…” He looked up at Lily. “She wanted me to tell you thanks for her, because ya helped me out.” Lily smiled reassuringly, making his way towards the smaller couch.

“Leave it to her to be the overly polite one, between the two of you.” Lily laughed and Gajeel smirked.

“Nah, now I wouldn’t say that…” Lily replied. “Tell her for me, thank you.”

She’s the only polite one.” He stated, as Lily had taken a seat, in the middle of the loveseat.

“Nah, now I wouldn’t say that…” Lily replied. “You thanked me yourself, too.”

“Yea…” Gajeel replied, looking away, but he was still smirking. “I would definitely thank you for anythin’ Lily, but fuck everybody else. Nobody else in this miserable world, deserves it…” And Lily again had to laugh at that, as Gajeel made his way over to the desk, to plug his phone back into the charger. He also had his wallet and clothes in a plastic bag, hanging on the back of the desk chair. Once his phone was plugged in and charging, he set it down and then reached into the bag for his wallet, to pull out some cash. “And speakin’ of that… Let me give you some cash fer comin’ all that way, to come pick me up and for gettin’ my bike… And for the drive tomorrow too… I know drivin’ that truck all the way downtown, back and forth like that, had to of costed ya…”

“Nah, nooo…” Lily answered waving a hand at Gajeel, who was now holding some cash. “Put yer money away and just sit down and talk with me for a bit. I haven’t seen you in forever and I’m tired of watching you hobble around on that leg.” Gajeel nodded and shoved the money back into his wallet, knowing Lily was too stubborn to accept it. He set it down and slowly began to make his way back towards the long couch, to the right of where Lily was sitting.

“Trust me man, I’m tired of it too.” He huffed, his body basically plopping down onto the couch.

“I would imagine.” Lily replied. “And actually… You just seem really exhausted so, I won’t keep you up, long. I’ll keep this short.” He then added, leaning a hand onto his own knee, as his feet rested on the floor. Gajeel had basically slouched back into the couch, but his feet were also on the ground.
“This, huh?” Gajeel repeated skeptically, waiting for an explanation. Lily brought a hand up to his chin, as if pondering.

“Oh, yea... Listen Gajeel.” He began dropping the hand back to his knee. “We both know, that I know about your work... And that I know about the people you work for. In saying that, you are also aware that I wouldn’t normally ask you any questions whatsoever, but...” He drifted, bringing his hands together, a fist going into his palm. He hit it once, then twice, before finally dropping both hands down together, in his lap. “Something is off.” He finished definitively.

Gajeel shifted his head away from Lily, his body bending forwards slowly, so that he was no longer sinking into the couch. He groaned with the movement and then he stared at the floor, his back bending, as he leaned a bit forwards.

“And I don’t just mean the injuries... Although I gotta say...” Gajeel glanced up at Lily, who was speaking with his eyebrows stretched high, over the span of his forehead. “I’ve never seen you lookin’ this beat up before...” The one corner of Gajeel’s lip curled up, just a tiny bit at that, but only for a second, as he glanced away from Lily again. “No... It’s not your arm or that leg... It’s somethin’ else.” Lily continued. “And I feel like it’s something you do wanna tell me.” Gajeel was shaking his head though, still refusing to look at Lily.

“Lily I...” Gajeel started, but Lily hadn’t finished.

“Now just wait, Gajeel.” Lily spoke, holding up a hand, to stop him. “That place, I picked you up from.” Gajeel groaned audibly at hearing those words. He also began adjusting his position, as if his body refused to get comfortable. “It was an apartment.” Lily confirmed, clearly not asking, but stating what he knew to be true. Gajeel was sitting up at this, his eye matching Lily’s at long last, as his brow lowered. “Now you tell me if this is untrue. If that was somewhere unsafe, you wouldn’t have had me show up there?” Lily seemingly asked, but it had again, sounded more like a statement.

“Look man...” Gajeel began, but was again cut off.

“Is that statement untrue?” Lily reiterated, causing Gajeel to roll his eyes and look away. His good hand came down on his knee in frustration.

“No, it isn’t.” He finally huffed out, like a child not getting his way.

“Right.” Lily answered. “And the phone call.” He then chimed, leaning back some as he continued. “It was a cell phone number. I know, because that is how it popped up, on the caller ID screen, of my business phone.” Lily pointed to the phone on the desk behind him, before dropping his hand. “If it had been that burner phone of yours, it would have said unknown. Not only that, but your phone was dead...”

“I needed to reach you.” Gajeel stated, a little annoyed.

“Yea, but you wouldn’t have called my number with a phone, that you borrowed from somebody you work with, right? Is that statement fair to say?” Lily then asked and Gajeel again, had to look up towards the ceiling to roll his eyes.

“That’s fair.” He answered, in a flat tone.

“Okay so...” Lily began. “Then you tell me what that was about, because you don’t normally leave a booty call lookin’ that banged up.” Lily implied, gesturing towards Gajeel’s arm in the sling.

“It ain’t like that!” Gajeel finally snapped. Standing up so fast that he found himself cringing and plopping back down onto the couch and hissing from the pain. “Gaahhh! Damn it!” He seethed, the
sutures in his leg were stinging like fire, from the sudden action. Lily was silent for a moment, his eyes studying the reddened face of Gajeel, as he slowly recovered from his own reaction. Finally, once Gajeel was leaning forwards, Lily chose to speak, refusing to drop the subject, despite the sudden anger it seemed to stir out of his friend.

“So… Is this about a girl then?” Lily then asked. Again, making his question sound like a statement, as he seemed to already instinctively know, that he was right. “Or perhaps a lucky gentleman?” He then jested, but that only served to earn him a death glare in return.

“You were right the first-time, you asshole.” Gajeel seethed out from under his breath. His body was still hunched over, from the fiery pain coursing through his leg. Lily brought his hands up in mock defense.

“Well, all right. I just wanted you to be aware, that I would support you no matter which way, you went.” Lily chimed in, his tone light as he continued to tease Gajeel.

“You fuckin’ know which way I am.” Gajeel growled in response.

“True, my friend. True.” Lily answered with a chuckle. Once his laughter had died, he looked to Gajeel, expecting at least, some slight amusement, but just like before, when they had been in the bathroom, Gajeel was frowning again. There was no enjoyment on his face, whatsoever.

Gajeel waited for the silence, before finally choosing to speak up, his demeanor now, solemn.

“How did you know?” He asked, trying to get to the root of Lily’s questioning.

“Well… You couldn’t even crack a smile, when I made a joke about you needing a woman earlier…” Lily explained. “And I gotta say… I found it a bit odd, that you didn’t use that comment I made, as an opportunity to brag, about spending the night at some girl’s apartment…” Lily answered. “Plus, with how yer lookin’ and how you acted… Something’s just… Different.” Lily’s explained. “I haven’t ever, seen you like this before.”

Gajeel said nothing for a moment. He just stared at ground, hunched over his knees. His hand over the sling protectively.

“Her name is Levy.” He finally answered, after what felt like an eternity of staring at the ground.

“Her name is Levy.” He finally answered, after what felt like an eternity of staring at the ground.

“That’s a nice name.” Lily was quick to compliment, in return.

“Yea…” Gajeel answered, sitting up a bit, but still refusing to look up. “She isn’t like any of the others.” He explained. “I didn’t meet her at a bar… Or convince her to take me home in a matter of hours…”

“Well, I already figured that, seeing as you remember her name Gajeel.” Lily stated and Gajeel finally looked up at his friend.

“She is a college student.” Gajeel continued, gaining courage as he spoke. “She wants to become a doctor…” He paused, a small smile washing over his face. “She works very hard and is very dedicated to that goal.” He glanced away again, the tiny smile vanishing. “She was the one who helped me last night, with…” He visibly squeezed his sling arm and then moved his hand towards the sutures in his leg. “All… of this.” Lily’s eyes widened.

“That’s impressive!” Lily exclaimed and Gajeel finally smirked widely in response, so clearly proud, that Lily found it hard not to smile as well.
“She needed help this time…” Gajeel continued, still smiling. “The first time I hurt my leg, she mended it up for me, at her apartment. But this last time, she took me to somebody she trusted… A crotchety old doctor, who clearly knew what she was doing and Levy managed to do that discreetly, because like you… She knows… Everything about who I am.” He finished, his smile fading.

“Well, that’s a good thing, Gajeel… That just means she accepts you.” Lily offered.

“Lily…” Gajeel addressed firmly. “We’re not together.” He stated and Lily tilted his head in confusion at that.

“It kind of sounds like, you are.” Lily replied folding his arms, but Gajeel could only shake his head.

“No… We aren’t. I’ve known her, for a few years now… But I’ve only grown closer to her more recently… Before that, it was all just kind of… Accidental run ins, and bad ones at that… That’s the only reason why she knows… Not, because I sat her down and told her, but because she accidently got involved with my work, by jus bein’ in the wrong place at the wrong time… And honestly… Pretty sure, she hated me up until the night I hurt my leg… But now…” Gajeel paused, rubbing the back of his neck, unsure of what to say. “Now I don’t know what she feels towards me… We spent one night together… And then last night, I think she only invited me there to sleep, because I was so hurt. That’s all.”

“You love her.” Lily spoke and Gajeel snapped his head up.

“What?” He asked, clearly startled, that Lily had just figured it out so quickly.

“It’s obvious… You’re never like this.” Lily explained and Gajeel’s ears were turning red. “That’s why I assumed you were in a relationship with her. I’ve never heard you talk more than two sentences, about a girl you’ve spent the night with…” Lily drifted, his eyes matching Gajeel’s “I mean… am I wrong?” He then shrugged and Gajeel was again looking away, his embarrassment clear.

“Didja you have to jus, come out and say it like that…?! I mean Jesus, hell…” He muttered and at that, Lily was smiling.

“So, it’s true then?!” Lily then asked, his excitement becoming apparent, as a grin had formed over his face.

“Yea fine! Whatever!” Gajeel shouted, earning a boisterous laugh from his friend, who stood up.

“Gajeel! Congratulations!” He cheered, stepping towards him like he wanted a handshake or a bear hug. “I thought this day would never come!” Lily’s arm was going out towards Gajeel, who was still sitting on the edge of the couch, but he only glared up at Lily in return.

“Will you sit down! I ain’t huggin’ you!” Gajeel snapped and Lily could only laugh as he took his out stretched hand back and turned back around. Never offended, when Gajeel refused him for any sort of brotherly affection, as he knew it was often out of character for Gajeel, except in rare moments. “And stop actin’ like this is a good thing, damn it! It’s not! It’s the worst!” Gajeel was shouting, as Lily sat back down and faced him again, his smile still intact. “Because it doesn’t matter how I feel about her anyways!” This was the part that finally had Lily frowning, in misunderstanding.

“What? Of course, it does, why would you say that?!” Lily then asked, a bit alarmed.

“Because I have ta stay away from her!” Gajeel exclaimed, clearly enraged. “All I’ve done since day one, is put her in danger! And the last time it happened, it was almost too much…” Gajeel was
explaining, his voice calming. “I’ve given her nothin’, but hell and I don’t wanna do that anymore…” Lily paused, his brow coming together as he considered Gajeel’s words. There were a few brief seconds of silence, before Lily then, finally returned with a suitable question in response.

“Well, what does she want?” Gajeel sat back on the couch, his brow lowering in contemplation at Lily’s question.

“Right now…” He answered gently. “She has been very insistent on helping me. She offered to help me with the recovery of my shoulder…” Gajeel explained, moving his hand over the sling subconsciously. “She says, she wants to stay in contact with me, because she worries too much otherwise…” Gajeel glanced up. “All her words, not mine.” He finished and Lily sat back and shook his head.

“Gajeel…” He began with caution. “It sounds like, she might feel the same way as you…” Lily suggested. “Don’t you see that?” He then asked, but Gajeel was shaking his head.

“No, you don’t get it. Levy is just that way.” Gajeel began. “The night I met her, she was standin’ up to me, with iron fist and all… Defendin’ a man she didn’t even know…” Gajeel ran a hand, over his drying scalp. “That girl… She’s gotta be less than five feet tall… And hell, she probably only weighs about 80 pounds…” His hand dropped. “She’s so, small…” Gajeel spoke the words softly, almost as if it worried him. “She knew I could easily hurt her, if I had wanted too and I could see that, on her face…” The image of Levy when she had first laid eyes on him, was becoming visible in Gajeel’s mind. “She was trembling…” He continued, recalling the rest of the memory, vividly. “It didn’t stop her from tryin’ though…” He drifted, closing his eyes as he remembered her standing up to face him, shielding Bora in the process. “Since then, she has done that, at least two other times…” He continued, recalling the night he had attacked Boze, in front of her at the restaurant and how she had physically tried to stop him. And then lastly, the night she had stood in front of Thibault, at the club. Gajeel opened his eyes again. “The last time, put her in some very real danger…”

“Gajeel, please…” Lily addressed, earning his friend’s eyes back up. Lily’s face had become very determined. Almost as if he was begging Gajeel to really consider what he was saying, with just his expression. “Has she ever shown you affection? Think about that and be honest.”

“I told you… We fucked.” Gajeel responded and Lily cracked a smile of amusement, despite himself and the seriousness of their conversation.

“Yea… But, I mean… Other than, during that time?” Lily then asked, folding his arms. Gajeel’s mind immediately jumped to the kiss at the hospital. How Levy had wrapped her arms around him and held onto him, for dear life, before pushing her lips onto his. He sat there, stumped, his mind slowly recalling that kiss, followed by the next. The one outside of her apartment just the night before. She had told him then, that she was ‘tired of being afraid’, and that she had wanted him to ‘stay’. He closed his eyes, thinking of how she had kissed him, so sweetly. How she had spent the night sleeping, beside him, resting her head over his lap.

“Yea… She…” He opened his eyes. “She has… A couple of times now… actually…” And Lily couldn’t fight the smile, that was growing over his face, even if Gajeel was too distracted to notice. “I didn’t really know what to do about it…” Gajeel was staring down at his own knees. “Cause it complicated everything…” His words were slow and powerful, as if they held a lot of weight. “I guess I hoped it was just something fleeting, for not only me, but for her too… So that, this could just be over, somehow… But…” He looked up to Lily, his eyes were narrowed just a bit. They seemed to be masking a great deal of pain, behind them. “I don’t really want it to be over.” Lily’s expression eased, his eyes looking a bit sympathetic as he saw how lost Gajeel appeared to be, but he held onto a weak smile.
“Gajeel…” He addressed, shaking his head, his smile widening. “It’s all right.” He explained, his arms opening. “You are allowed to have something good in your life too, just like everybody else. You are allowed to love someone.” Gajeel’s jaw was tightening at that, for some reason he had a hard time swallowing that, and it made the pain in his chest grow. “You know… I have been waiting a long time to see this for you… To see you have something like this, in your life.” Lily’s smile was growing to a full out grin. “Now that you’ve found it, I urge you to hold on, because, despite what you might think of yourself, you deserve it…” Gajeel shifted his head down, once Lily had finished speaking. He could feel those unwanted emotions, pulling at the back of his throat and from the inside of his chest, but he managed to stuff them back.

“Lily…” Gajeel began. “I appreciate your support… Really I do… But…” He kept his eyes down and he took a small haggard breath. “It’s already too late…” He finally managed to pull his head back up, but he was now staring at the black screen of the television set in front of him, because he still could not bring himself to look at Lily. “I already refused her offer and then I left… I know where she lives, but I ain’t goin’ back… It’s not like I really can anyways… With my leg like this… I don’t know when she’s home and I already told her I’d stay away… And I don’t have a way to contact her otherwise—”

“Not true.” Lily finally interrupted Gajeel’s pitiful list of excuses and Gajeel, was looking up at Lily in question. “You used her phone to call mine Gajeel… Didn’t you…?” Lily questioned, his head leaning in, as a smirk had formed over his face.

“I- Uh…” Lily was pointing to the business phone on the desk, where Gajeel’s burner phone was currently charging.

“Her number is the last one that called on that phone, Gajeel.” And Gajeel’s jaw went slack at that, unable to process anything else. Lily grinned at his friend’s shocked expression and then he finally stood up. “Listen Gajeel, I’m goin’ to say my piece, and then I’m going to leave you down here and go to bed…” He folded his arms, stepping forwards and looking down at Gajeel, a smirk over his face. “I get that you love this girl and so you are probably worried about her feelings, towards you… Not wanting to get hurt, more than likely, or worse… You think you are not worthy of her…” Lily’s smirk disappeared. “But Gajeel, genuinely consider her feelings and be honest with yourself… You see them, don’t you? Even if you’ve been telling yourself, it isn’t true…” Lily’s arms unfolded and he bent over, resting a large hand on Gajeel’s uninjured shoulder. His head coming near eyelevel. “All I’m trying to say is… If she wants to help you… Let her…” Lily’s eyes shined a bit, as he continued. “Because not only are ya gonna need it, but also because, you’ve had it hard Gajeel…” Lily’s hand rocked Gajeel’s good shoulder a bit, as he squeezed it. “You’ve had a hard life… So, trust me when I say, it’s about time something good comes along for you, my friend…” He finished, patting Gajeel’s shoulder two times, before stretching back up to this full height. He smiled one last time as Gajeel, just stared up at him, unsure of what to say. Lily then turned away, to start heading towards the stairs. “Ultimately, it’s up to you of course, but hey… If you do end up wanting to call her tonight… Just hit the down arrow button, on the phone and her number should be the first one, that pops up.” Lily explained, with his back turned as he made it to the foot of the stairs.

“Goodnight.” He then called, behind himself, heading up the stairs with a sly grin over his face.

Gajeel watched as Lily disappeared up the stairs, before swiveling his head back around, to glance at the business phone sitting across the room.

Shit… He cursed internally, while staring at it, with mild panic building in his heart.

Natsu was standing outside the door of Erza’s loft, after having knocked on the surface. His eyes were up and elsewhere, his arms folding in impatience, as he glanced around in wonder. It had been
about two minutes, since he had started waiting there and he was just about ready to start banging on the door again. This time, much more loudly, as he couldn’t understand what was taking them so long to answer. Finally, he scoffed in irritation, bringing his fist back down onto the grain of the wood, hard.

“Hello?! Anyone there?! Ya guys told me to come here and here I am, so open the damn door!” He hollered, while banging on the wood, until finally the door swung open to reveal the very irate face of Cana, on the other side.

“Shhh!” She was telling him, with a finger in front of her lips and Natsu could only shrug, his confusion and annoyance apparent.

“What the hell is goin’ on?! You guys- Whoa!” He snapped, but Cana was grabbing him by the scarf and yanking him inside and slamming the door shut behind him. She had let him go, her hands going to her hips, as Natsu’s eyes were wondering around the loft full of people, in question.

“Will you shut up!” She snapped in a loud voice, that wasn’t quite a yell. “We’re already concerned about what the neighbors may have heard or seen, and we don’t need some idiot giving us all away!” Natsu was basically ignoring her though, his eyes having noticed Erza sitting in the middle of the couch with Gray on one side of her and Mira on the other. Both of them touching her with a certain amount of comfort, that Natsu knew to mean something was wrong.

Erza’s head was lowered in such a way, that he could not see her face, her hair partly shielding her. Gray had an arm around her shoulders and Mira was holding her one hand tightly. Erza’s other hand was sitting uselessly in her own lap, covered in what appeared to be blood. Elfman was standing just off to the side of the couch, his arms folded and a large frown over his face. Then lastly there was a child, of about the ages of ten or eleven, just sitting in the large armchair to the left of where Mira was positioned. Her small legs only just, stretching to the end of the cushion and barely even hanging off, due to her height. Her eyes looked reddened and very sad, a forlorn expression planted over the young girl’s face.

Natsu’s brow lowered in concern, as his head swiveled around the room and then he looked back to Cana in question, his expression becoming serious.

“What happened…?” He asked darkly and Cana could only sigh.

“Erza’s informant has been shot, by Aria…” Natsu looked to Erza at that, his eyes widening. He slowly stepped away from the doorway, heading towards her.

“Erza…” He addressed, his voice deep.

“Natsu don’t.” Gray advised, as he looked up at him. “Not right now.”

“I just… I just want to know… If you’re hurt…” He then asked Erza, ignoring Gray. His head had lowered and his expression had eased to one of saddened worry. There was silence, as everyone looked on in worry and then finally Erza rose her head, her hair parting some to reveal her nose more.

“No…” She answered in a raspy voice and Natsu let out a small breath.

“Good…” He answered, but then he folded his arms. “I’m sorry about your friend…” He then added. “We’ll pay Jose back…” Erza glanced up at Natsu, her one red eye looking to him, studying his face and stance.

“He left the insignia in his blood, Natsu…” She finally spoke. “For you…” She added. “It was on
the wall of the Casino, for everybody to see… There are crime scene photos of it…” And Natsu couldn’t help but crack a smile. “He always admired your resolve.” She added.

“Good man…” Natsu answered. “He sounds like a real fighter.” And Erza’s own lip upturned just a bit, despite herself. Her eyes glancing down.

“He is…”

“Then he’ll make it.” Natsu replied, his smile growing in a confident smirk. “I know it.” Erza glanced up at him again and nodded, and the others around them, couldn’t help, but smile a little as well, despite the gravity of the situation. Hope seeming to be within grasp, at the presence of Natsu’s positive voice.

“Ah good, you are all here.” Came the raspy old voice of Master Makarov, who had just appeared from around the hallway. Everyone was looking up in suspense, as Porlyusica had appeared right after him, peeling off a pair of bloody blue, surgery gloves.

“What’s the news?” Gray was the first one to ask, what everyone else was wondering.

“He survived the procedure.” The old woman answered, and soon everyone in the room was cheering, save for the Makarov and Porlyusica. Natsu was grinning, as he turned to look at Erza, who was also smiling and laughing, while being pulled into a hug by Mirajane.

“See, told ya!” He mused, but Porlyusica was clearing her throat. Her frustration showing, as she clearly had more to say.

“Will you all shut it!” She finally snapped, making everyone’s cheers instantly die. “Just, because he made it through the surgery, it doesn’t mean he is out of the woods!” Everyone was now silent and the old woman cleared her throat, to continue speaking in a much calmer voice. “I removed the bullet and sutured what I could, but he has still lost a considerable amount of blood.” She closed her eyes.

“Any human being in the right mind, could see that he needs to be in the care of a hospital, but seeing as that is not an option in this case… I suggest we find someone here, who can donate blood to him. The sooner the better… Then once that is done, he will need to be monitored around the clock, for at least the next few days, until his condition improves.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem…” Erza finally spoke up softly, causing everyone to look at her. “He will just be staying here.” She explained, Porlyusica looked to the girl with understanding, her stern exterior fading, just a bit.

“Very well.” She answered. “I suggest we change the bedding and get a new mattress. Keep things clean… I am taking a sample of his blood back to the hospital to determine his blood type and then we can conduct a transfusion more than likely, once we figure that out. So, I will be returning with equipment. I would also like to come in each day and check upon his progress.” She stated and Erza nodded.

“Of course, thank you.” And Porlyusica only frowned.

“Don’t bother thanking me.” She returned rather rudely. “If you, young people would just live your lives responsibly, then I wouldn’t need to treat these patients, I seem to keep getting, in secret, and this whole process would be a lot easier.” She snapped, her tone bitter. “Consider that! And what you put your bodies through!” She urged coldly, her eyes darting around the room at all of them, only to land on Natsu last. Almost as if she knew, who the most careless of them all, was. He looked
a bit fearful when he noticed her rigid stare was still on him, but Porlyusica then closed her eyes and cleared her throat again. “I’ll be on my way now.” She stated, opening her eyes. “Wendy,” She then addressed. “Wait for me here, because I will be back from the hospital shortly.” The young girl only nodded and then the old woman made her way towards the door and walked out quickly without another word. All eyes then landed on Makarov once she was gone, it was now his turn to clear his throat.

“For those of you who don’t know… That was my old friend Porlyusica and the young lady over there is her granddaughter…” He gestured and Wendy nodded. “She is the chief of staff at Magnolia Medical and I only brought her here, because I knew we could trust her and, because I had faith that she could save our patient…” He explained, the room still quiet. “Now that she has done her part… It is time that we do ours…”

“What are we going to do, gramps?” Natsu asked, folding his arms again and Makarov sighed.

“Jose has us in a spot and he knows it…” Makarov explained. “For those who don’t know, Erza’s plan to try and arrest Aria for attempted murder last night, backfired. Jose is now trying to pin the attack for Banaboster’s life on Erza’s informant, Jellal Fernandez… Who is obviously still in critical condition, after Aria shot him last night. Now he is blaming the police, demanding an apology from them, issued by her.”

“Oh hell! No way!” Natsu was suddenly yelling.

“Natsu!” Makarov scolded. “We will likely end up having to oblige… Only because, in the eye of the public, we are in the wrong.”

“And he expects it quickly.” Erza stated. “I already have a message from his attorney, wishing to meet. The desk officer at the station left me a voicemail on my cell… But…”

“We’ll deal with that…” Gray suddenly chimed in, pointing to himself and Elfman, realizing Erza meant Juvia.

“What?!” Elfman gasped in shock. “We will?!” He questioned Gray, in confusion. Gray looked to Erza, a small smile over his face.

“Yea… Because you’re going to need to be here anyways… Watching over Jellal… We’ll deal with Jose’s attorney or anybody else he sends along the way, until you get back.” Gray added, matching eyes with Erza. They held their stare, a silent confirmation between them and Erza nodded. Elfman meanwhile, was rubbing the back of his neck.

“I mean yea… We can…” He spoke. “Anything to help you out, captain…” He then added, looking to Erza and she smiled gently in return.

“I appreciate that…” She responded.

“Aw man…” Natsu sighed. “This is bull…” He huffed.

“Nobody is disagreeing with you Natsu, but this is what needs to be done.” Makarov stated. “Cana…” He then addressed and she picked up her head. “We may need to use you more in the field, now that are main intel person is down.” Cana smirked at that.

“No problem sir… I’ll do whatever you need.” She stated, looking a bit excited.

“Good, I don’t expect you to be putting yourself in any sort of real danger, but I know you are familiar with some of the taverns around town, where some of Jose’s men might frequent.” And
Cana nodded.

“Oh, wait gramps…!” Natsu hollered. “What about me…?! I definitely know some places, where shady stuff goes down!” Makarov looked to Natsu, his mind pondering the question, as Natsu stared back at him, clearly at the ready and excited.

“Sorry, but no, Natsu.” He finally answered and Natsu’s face fell.

“Ah, but why not?!” Natsu cried, clearly let down.

“Natsu, I know your intentions are good, but I still think your methods are not discreet enough… And I am not willing to take that chance just yet, after your last misstep… Please understand, my boy… Your time will come.” Makarov explained, doing his best to be fair and justify his choices. Natsu folded his arms in frustration.

“Ugh, fineee.” He returned in a flat tone.

“Serves you right, after what ya did last time, idiot.” Gray muttered and Natsu whipped around, his fierce eye landing on Gray, who was still sitting on the couch.

“Ey! You got somethin’ ta say to me!” Natsu snapped.

“Knock it off, the both of you!” Makarov shouted over the both of them, just as Gray was about to retort. “Look at us!” He demanded angrily, getting everyone’s attention. “Jose has just pulled off a very real and dangerous attack on one our own! I need not remind you, of what he is truly capable of, as you all know firsthand! So now, is not the time to be fighting amongst ourselves!” At that Natsu unfolded his arms and his expression grew more serious. “We mustn’t let this act of injustice slide! We need to fight, but we must do it in a way that does not harm our image in the eyes of the public! Especially now, after what Jose has managed to do!” Makarov’s eyes moved around the room and then finally landed on Mira, who had finally let go of Erza’s one hand. “Mirajane!” She stood up and everyone now looked to her. “We spoke about what needs to be done and it is time we let everyone else in on it, as well.”

“Yes Master…” She bowed her head, a small smile creeping over her lips. “And it cannot wait.” Everyone looked to her, bewildered confusion coming over their faces, as Mira looked ahead. A determined expression had grown over her face, seemingly unafraid. “Everyone here knows…” She began, running a hand through her hair. “That Banaboster Goodrich has a weakness for the wiles of a beautiful young woman.” She explained, with a sweet smile and then a wink. Alarming everyone with her words, including Erza. Who by far looked the most concerned, aside from Elfman, as she stared up at the brave young woman standing just beside her. The one who had been comforting her throughout most of the night.

Levy had been working for a few hours, sitting at her desk bent over a book and notebook, writing notes every so often. She finally leaned back in her computer chair, stretching her arms up and over her head, as she yawned. Fastening a hand to her elbow as she followed through with the stretch and ended it, by dropping them both back down with a sigh. She pushed her glasses back over her nose after a, moments worth of peace, turning her chair to face the clock on her dresser.

It was just after ten o’clock and Levy could feel it in her bones, she was so tired. She looked back to the notebook in front of her, her eyes doing a quick scan of her progress, her mind trying to decide if it was enough for one night. Truth be told, she felt like she was falling a bit behind, but she knew if
she didn’t get some sleep soon, she would be completely useless anyways. Finally, after considering both options she chose to close the notebook and call it quits.

“That’s enough for tonight… I’ll do extra tomorrow…” She justified to nobody, pushing her chair back and standing up with another stretch of her arms. She could feel the strain in her muscles, as she pulled at them, trying to force the kinks out, one by one. Not only did she need to rest for her brain’s sake, but for her body’s sake, as well. She felt so stiff from the lack of sleep she had gotten.

Levy leaned forwards switching off her desk lamp, leaving the room all, but dark, with the exception of the light that flowed in through the window from outside. She had already changed into her pajama pants and a tank top, brushed her teeth and set her alarm clock. All she really needed to do was crawl into bed and then let sleep claim her. Which honestly, seemed like it would be just about the easiest thing to do. Levy picked up her phone and the cup of water she had been drinking and brought both objects, over to the small bedside table and set them down. Her bare feet then kicked something, just as she had been about to climb into bed.

Levy paused, both hands on the bed and then she glanced down to find her school bag at her feet. She reached down picking it up, wondering why she had left it there. She then started heading back towards the desk chair with it. Setting the bag down in the seat, when something suddenly caught her eye. A slight gleam of moonlight bouncing off of something inside the bag. Levy tilted her head in question, reaching inside the bag, only to pull out what she quickly realized was the knife she had put in there. Thibault’s knife, she had entirely forgotten about it.

It rested in both of her open hands, as she glanced down at in question, unsure of how she had let herself forget about its existence. She continued to wonder, as she made her way back towards the bed, climbing inside with it still in her hand. She laid there with her back against the pillow contemplating it. Her mind once again on Gajeel. Remembering the advice, he had given her about learning how to use it, to fight back in case she ever found herself in trouble again.

Maybe I will… She thought, thinking of how she would like to become less useless. Her eyelids lowered as she let out a small breath, finally lowering her hands and the knife onto her lap. I need to sleep… She thought, feeling that exhaustion once more. She then picked her one hand up, holding the knife and reached over, setting it down on the bedside table, just beside her phone. Followed by her glasses, right after.

Once the objects were in place, she shoved her legs under the blankets of her bed, before letting her head fall to the pillow at long last. Her eyes closed almost instantly, sleep claiming her in mere minutes.

Gajeel was pacing, despite how much the stitches in his leg protested against it. Still residing, in the mostly dark living room of Lily’s house. Staggering back and forth in what appeared to be small circles, in front of the desk where Lily’s business phone was sitting. His eyes occasionally landing on the object, of all of his dread and anxiety time and time again.

Every second he so much as thought, about reaching for the phone, his heart would begin to beat frantically in his chest, resulting in the continuation of his circles instead. It had probably been about two hours of that in fact, and his body hurt like hell, because of it. His stiffening muscles were demanding sleep, but his mind simply would not allow it. There was no way he could rest while so on edge. Not when he kept imagining visuals of Levy’s face, as she came near to kiss him, followed by the memory of her retreating back, as she walked away from him, in her apartment. It all just hurt too much and his head felt like it was on a swivel after hearing Lily’s side of things.

Lily was a good man and easily Gajeel’s best friend, with Juvia being more like his adopted sister.
He cared about them both and so, he did not take their opinions for granted either. They were both good people, who cared about his well-being deeply, despite himself not being worthy of their concern.

Gajeel shook his head, remembering the way Lily’s face lit up, when he had confirmed his feelings for Levy to be true. For some reason, seeing his old friend that happy for him, had made Gajeel feel good, even though he had gotten angry at the time. Just feeling that kind of support from somebody as incredible as Lily, was somehow just comforting, even if he knew Lily was wrong.

Gajeel was eyeing the phone again, as he thought about this. I know he’s wrong… He thought, remembering Lily’s words. It doesn’t matter if my life has been hard… I made the choices that brought me here… Gajeel’s mind was running, as he thought about the old woman at the hospital. The one who had warned him to keep away from Levy and told him the very same thing. That he had made ‘certain choices’ were her words… She was right… I need to stay away… He thought hopelessly. His pacing having stopped, his hand suddenly reaching for the phone, despite the thought.

Gajeel paused, his hand shaking, as his fingers neared the phone, just sitting there on the receiver. Lily’s grin appearing in his vision, followed by Juvia’s sad eyes as she sat across from him at the diner. And then lastly, Levy’s face as she told him, she didn’t know how to let him go. The jump in his heart from that moment, was finally enough. It was the push he needed, to actually pick up the phone.

He stood there frozen in the dark, so quiet he felt like he wasn’t even breathing, the dial tone humming. He brought a shaking thumb down on the button, that was a downward arrow. The screen lighting up a yellowish green, black pixelated letters and numbers appearing over it. The words read ‘Cell Number’ followed by a series of numbers on the second line. Gajeel’s lips parted and he swallowed. He hit the call button and listened. The sounds of beeps were going off in the phone, as he shakily brought it up to his ear.

Finally, after what felt like forever, it rang. Gajeel’s whole body stiffened as he inhaled a breath. Once, twice, three times. It felt like it went on for hours, as Gajeel stood there a prisoner of time and the sounds of the phone. Then finally the ringing stopped, only to be replaced with a beep, the indication that it was going voicemail.

“Hi! You have reached Levy McGarden’s phone! Sorry I can’t talk right now.” He heard her voice, but he couldn’t stand to listen to it anymore, knowing it wasn’t her, so he just hit the end button, before the message could continue. The breath he had been holding released and with it came, what felt like eons of disappointment, as his hand slowly lowered to the desktop. He was still holding the phone, something like disbelief keeping him on his feet, as he realized how stupid he truly was.

He set the phone down with a thud, stepping away from the desk with a cringe. That pain in his leg reminding him, he should not still be standing.

‘I’m such a fucking idiot… He thought. Why did I let myself believe that would work…? He wondered, as he thought of Lily and his dumb idea. Welp… So much fer that… He thought, slowly staggering towards the couch, his head bowing and his eyes closing, until a loud sound went off in his ears.

Gajeel’s head snapped up, his eyes opening wide, as he turned his head. The screen on the phone was glowing. The sound of it ringing filling the quiet room like sirens. He stood there, unable to move at first, as he could see the same number he had just dialed popping up on the screen. Finally, after a few more rings the phone beeped, going to the answering machine, where Lily’s voice suddenly spoke.
“You’ve reached Extalia Body Shop and Repair, sorry I missed your call, but if you just leave your name, number and the nature of your call. I’ll be sure to get back to you as soon as possible. And if you are calling for my hours, the shop is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. every weekday, and from 7 to noon every Saturday. Thanks again for your business and talk to you soon!” Once the message had finished there was another beep and then silence. Gajeel paused, expecting the sound of a phone hanging up, or for the message to just stop.

“Hello?!” Gajeel sat there in disbelief, as Levy’s voice came over the answering machine. “Is anyone there?! Somebody just called me from this number…” There was another brief pause. “Gajeel?” She then asked, and he could no longer take it anymore. His body basically leaping for the phone, as he picked it up, Levy’s voice still speaking. “I’m sorry, I made a mistake.”

“Levy!” Gajeel hollered into the receiver, after hitting the accept button on the phone, and the answering machine turned off.

Silence… Gajeel froze, thinking she had hung up. That he had missed her again, his eyes closing.

“Gajeel…” Came her voice, and he could no longer take it anymore. His body basically leaping for the phone, as he picked it up, Levy’s voice still speaking. “I’m here… Levy” He answered.

Banaboster Goodrich was sitting at his desk, back at his office in the Twilight Ogre Casino. It was a small, dimly lit room, with wooden paneling and forest green carpeting and a lot of flashy decorating. Mostly a series of ogre-looking masks, that hung up on the back wall, above his head, painted in a vast array of bright colors. He was smoking a cigar, looking over some papers in front of himself on the desk. It was after hours, pretty late and the building was not open in lieu of recent events.

Banaboster brought his cigar down to the ashtray, his hand a bit shaky as he tapped at the edges and watched some of the ash fall off, and into the container. His eyes darted around the room, as he swallowed a bit. There was a hollowness in his stomach.

His nerves were still on high alert after almost being murdered the night before and now he was involved in all this controversy. With both the police and the Phantom Organization and he wanted nothing to do with any of it. He just wanted a way out and he would do anything to find it. Suddenly a knock on the door, had him jumping.

“Uhhh… Who is it?!” He questioned, regaining his composure.

“There’s a woman here to see you sir…” Came one of his men’s voices from the other side.

“A woman…?” Banaboster, scratched his head with a frown. His brow furrowing together in question. He hadn’t recalled sending for any, but now that his man was mentioning one, his interest was at least piqued. “Uhh… Okay… Send her in.” He answered, shaking his head with a shrug, as he brought a hand to his forehead.

The door opened and there stood a tall young woman, with long legs, made visible by the very high slit in her skirt. Her dress was black, which made her ivory skin glow in comparison. Her hair was a platinum white, tumbling loose over her bare shoulder and back. Her gown leaving little to the imagination, as her voluptuous curves were apparent. Banaboster’s jaw dropped, as the young woman stepped gracefully forwards. Her navy colored eyes landing over his face, as a small flirtatious smile played on her lips.

“Business first…” She spoke in a sweet voice, approaching his desk with confidence and a wink.
A/N: This story is now officially caught up in chapters, Chapter 17 is started, but not complete, so I am sad to say I don't know exactly when I will finish it. Might take a lot more time. Also my first time skip will be happening with it, but it will only be a few days, followed by a much longer one right after. Consider chapter 17 the end of an Act or like a halfway point. Thank you all for reading thus far and I hope you will continue to read once I post more. It's been about 3 years and a very hard three years at that. In that time I have changed a lot and endured a lot. Some of which I may share at some point when I feel ready too, but until then, thanks again.

Chapter End Notes

Thought I could leave you
'Cause I felt my heart numbing
It hit so deep I closed my eyes and I just took off running
I turned around and saw the look on your face
So I stay
Stay

But I don't need you
And you should know that baby
It'd take a miracle for you to really try and change me
Then I felt sorry for the look on your face
So I stay
Stay

So I stay
Stay

So I stay
Stay

You wanna leave her
Don't wanna hurt nobody
I don't believe a single word you say or that you're sorry
Why can't I say no to the look on your face
I just stay
Stay

So I stay
Stay

So I stay
Stay

Push me away, you push me away
But I always stay, I always stay, yeah
Push me away, you push me away
But I always stay, I always stay, yeah
Push me away, you push me away
But I always stay, I always stay, yeah
Push me away, you push me away
But I always stay, I always stay

But will you
Will you?
Will you?
So I stay
Stay

So I stay
Stay

I stay, I stay
Oh why do I stay?
So I stay
Stay
Chains

Chapter Summary

Gajeel is stuck reliving the worst moments of his past all day as him and Levy finally meet up. Gray makes a promise to Juvia. Erza causes mayhem. Jose completely loses his temper.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 17: Chains

That memory did exist somewhere, even if the wave of nostalgia that came with it was foreign, only because he had attempted to erase it from his mind, oh so many times. The images were like dark pencil lines, faded, but unable to be fully rubbed away. There would always be, but a vague outline just ghosting the page.

The sounds from that day had been reduced to mere echo's, reaching from somewhere far and hidden, but indiscernible as time was, but a paradox at that point in his youth. The cries were however, haunting, as they reverberated from somewhere within his being; much like the dying heartbeat of a rodent on the side of the road. And that struck down animal, who was meaningless to all who passed on by, was equal to that single moment for him. A victim, subject to all of the elements, like the burn of an unforgiving sun; with the process of decay being far too ugly to even bat an eye at, let alone face head on.

And so, Gajeel had continued to look the other way, as it rotted and festered somewhere deep inside of him, just like all of the rest. Ignored, as he had endured everyone else ignoring him; and then he had never looked back, because why should he care? Nobody ever did... People do not care for the well-being of those who are beneath them, or for those who are not like them.

Not even a single pause... And in his strive to become like the others, Gajeel had even done one better. He had become a monster, with no earthly attachments to cling to. Just as his father had proven to him, that such an existence was possible by simply forgoing one pointless emotion. An easy feat to achieve really, whilst struggling just to survive in a cold and unforgiving world. Even if, he could swear that he had seen that man shed a tear or two... None of that mattered anymore, because Gajeel had forgotten about that day, or so he had allowed himself to believe that he had at least. The cogs of fate however, were far too cruel.

He had been so young and so maybe, just maybe, he could convince himself that he did not remember her. Not the delicate curve of her lips when she smiled, or the pitch of her light laughter, or the way the freckles had lined a path over her nose and cheeks. Not the sun kissed complexion of her skin. Or the pair of gem-like eyes, that mirrored the very same color as his own, right back at him. Not the span of her long dark hair, tied back in a loose braid, or the way her untamed bangs framed her face. No, he could not remember her. She was never a person in his life and so she had never even existed as far as he was concerned.
"No!" Came the desperate cry of a voice, that Gajeel had never once heard sound fearful until that very day, and there he stood. Caught somewhere within the twilight; the cold chill of winter at his back. His father's voice screaming and crying her name, and he had just stood there. His feet on the floor, as if the threshold of the door had become the very pedestal of his foundation and he was not made of stone, but something far stronger that would never budge, like iron. His stance now being a mere monument of that moment and the only one to have ever existed, as it hauled up space in the very backend corner of his brain.

All he had been able to see was the empty room, torn asunder and his father's graying face as he begged to nobody, but the red painted walls, around him.

"No! No! No! No! God no! Please Please…! God! NO!" Screaming between tears.

He had been told to stay. 'Gajeel don't move.' His father had told him, commanding him to just wait there and to not step inside of that room, which was now just a space in time, forted up in his mind, but nowhere else in history. So obscene, so unbelievable, that he had chosen to not even realize that it had really happened.

And so, as far as he was concerned that woman, that beautiful, lovely woman who had given him life. Who had worked very hard, and had always taken care of him, was just a figment of his very own and Youthfully wanting, imagination. Just an unclear picture, that he could have seen anywhere and associated with anyone, but himself.

Somewhere Gajeel could hear his father laughing at him, but as he looked around, he could not decide where it was coming from. The echo of it was all around, taunting him as he closed his eyes and covered his ears.

"What do you want?!!" He was shouting.

"Open your eyes, boy!" And there it was, the light. Bright and white, as Gajeel opened his eyes, shielding his face from it. He was tired, hardly awake as his father stood there in the open doorway, of the latest house they had been staying at. It was basically a cabin on the outskirts of town, away from the city and in the woods, which was uncommon, but welcoming change.

"Good, your awake." Gajeel heard his father say as he rose his head up from the pillow, using a hand to keep the light from invading his tired eyes. He could barely make out the features of the man before him, as he stood; a shadow in the center of that light, tall and lean. His knuckles equipped with metal, as he was, 'always on the defense' as he called it, because the world was, 'a very dangerous place' as he had also said... Gajeel's father was the very picture of strong and watchful, and also the only bit of home, the boy had ever allowed himself to remember and thus, the only bit he had left.

"I'm goin' somewhere Gajeel... I got somethin' to take care of and it can't wait... I'll be back later though... I just wanted you to know, so ya don't wake up and freak out." Gajeel nodded in understanding, but he was still so tired, as well. All he had wanted to do, was to go back to sleep. "Good." His father had stated in response and then came the smirk, the very same Gajeel would soon learn to despise, as it would haunt him well into his adulthood. It was just too befitting of that man. All knowing, too confident and just like him… Then finally, Metalicana turned away, closing the door behind him, sequentially gone.

Gajeel had let his head collapse back onto the pillow in response. Lying there on the couch, blanket draped over his small body as he huffed out a breath of exhaustion. His eyes closing once more, now that the light had vanished. Having no idea that he would never lay eyes on that man, again. Blindsided once more, but this time he would not force himself to forget it. He would live on
knowing, and hating that man with everything he had in him.

Gajeel’s eyes opened and his body shot up from the couch where he had been sleeping in a slouched over position. Thus, the pillow he had been using under his injured shoulder for support, had also escaped and hit the floor. His body lurched forwards so fast, that he hit his knee on the glass coffee table in front of him.

"God Damn it!" He seethed between clenched teeth. Falling back into a sitting position on the sleek leather couch. He closed his eyes, his neck arching down as he sat there waiting for the soreness in his knee to pass. After a few seconds, his eyes opened and there he was, looking down at his own body. His one arm in a sling, the other hand just resting over the aforementioned knee.

There was a churn in his guts and a frown over his face, as he sat there in silence; accompanied by a sort of misery in his being, that he could not overlook. That dream and his father…

Gajeel’s mouth had opened, so that he could allow the air to escape his chest, almost as if he needed to pant to remember breathing. He hadn’t realized it at first, but his heart had been racing since the moment he had opened his eyes. His hand slowly lifted up from his knee so that he could examine it, as he could swear it was on the verge of trembling. He then closed his fingers upon further inspection, his eyelids lowering gently as he took another deep breath to calm his shaken nerves.

He hadn’t wanted to remember that. He never did, and so normally, he wouldn’t. So then, why now? *You know why…* Gajeel’s mind spoke, as his eyes opened and he sighed. He could feel his stomach twisting again. Uncertainty plaguing him, but he pushed himself up from the couch regardless.

His leg had healed up quite a lot in the last couple of days and so, he didn’t find standing to be such a chore anymore. He glanced around, thinking he should head towards the bathroom to clean himself up. He dragged his way down the hall, the frown still in place over his lips. Images of the woman from his dream, were still flashing through his mind. A kind smile over her face, as she looked down at him from somewhere above.

They had been in a warm place, with long grass, and graying skies. The image was faint, but Gajeel could remember the distinct color of yellow from dandelions and the way they smelled, grassy yet pollenated. His hands had been dirty, as he had basically been ripping them out from the ground, roots and all, in an effort to give them to her. And she had accepted them with a smile, just as he had hoped.

*There’s no way that was real…* He thought, knowing deep down it must have been a memory, but refusing to believe it… *And even if it was…* He thought next, turning on the light to his bathroom and arriving in front of the mirror. He made eye contact with his reflection, pushing a hand through his thick hair in distress, as it dragged over his scalp. *It doesn’t matter now…* His thought finished, as he stared at himself, his hand dropping to the counter in front of him.

A few minutes passed on by, as Gajeel stood in front of the sink of his bathroom lost in thought. His eyes glazing over as he stared hard into his own reflection, examining his features, before finally noticing the similarities of his father glaring right back at him. The last part of his dream coming to mind.

The last few images he had seen before waking up, the ones he had known for certain, were memories... That particular morning would always stick out in his mind, as that had been the day Metallicana left…
Gajeel's eyes fell away from the mirror only to land over his hand, as it rested upon the glossy marble counter of his bathroom sink. Levy… His mind spoke, as he imagined her face, a lovely smile across her lips. He knew she was the reason why he was thinking of them. Thinking of his parents.

They were the last people he truly remembered loving and once they were both gone… He had planned on never feeling that way again and yet here he was, back at it… Questioning all of his recent decisions, as he looked up at himself in the mirror one last time, his brow lowering in contemplation over his next move. I don't know about this…

Today was the day, he had agreed to see her again… And somehow, that made him truly afraid. Not just for rejection's sake, but for fear of harm coming to her as well. His life was just so complicated and he still had a lot to take care of in regards to the business end aspects of it.

It never stops though… He thought hopelessly, wishing for some kind of relief. He had yet to figure out how he was going to deal with Salamander and the whole fire situation, or Jose for that matter. His injured shoulder, doing its part to slow his progress down on all fronts and so maybe, that was part of the reason why he was more inclined to finally accept Levy's help.

Although Lily really had more to do with it, than anything. His words from the night he had helped Gajeel out, had left a certain lasting impression on Gajeel. One, that had really given him a reason to think back and reflect. Thus, maybe the real reason why Gajeel was being plagued with 'these dreams.'

Gajeel shook his head again, wishing that woman's face would just disappear from his head, but the idea of bringing Levy into his life, really made it hard for him not to think about the past. Get yer head on straight… Or else this is never gonna fly… Yer gonna have to be careful… And you've been anythin' but, whenever Levy is involved… Idiot… He thought with a grimace, as he brought a fist up to his temple.

Jose still had no knowledge of the condition Gajeel was currently in, nor did Juvia for that matter. He hadn't wanted either of them to know, because that would mean extra, unwanted, but warranted attention being thrown in his direction. And with his lack of 'checking in' as of late, it all just made him very worried that Jose would eventually grow suspicious.

As for Juvia, he hadn't wanted her to know about his shoulder for a hand full of reasons. One being, that he hadn't wanted to cause her anymore worry than he already had. He hated making her feel that way. Not only that, but she had enough on her plate as it was, what with Jose appointing her the job of securing an apology, from the captain of Magnolia police. Who had apparently, been damn near impossible for Juvia to reach all week, or so Gajeel had heard over the phone at least.

All well enough reasons on their own, for Gajeel not to even bother with telling Juvia about his latest injury, but his last few excuses were far less kind, and defiantly more self-serving in nature. Mostly he hadn't wanted to deal with another lecture from her, like he had, had to, at the restaurant.

She had been so angry with him that day, for not telling her, he had been stabbed and so, he hadn't wanted to face that wrath for a second time. And lastly, but most importantly, he hadn't wanted to tell Juvia, because he had also known that she would insist on helping him with his recovery… And Gajeel was pretty set on having Levy's help now instead.

It made sense after all, Levy had been the one to offer her help first and against his better judgment, Gajeel had finally chosen to accept it. And the less Juvia knew about their involvement in each other lives, the better. This was meant to be a secret kept between the two of them, or at least that had been the arrangement Levy and Gajeel had agreed upon, the night they spoke on the phone.
Gajeel was splashing water over his face, as Lily's large smile came to mind again. He would be so proud… Gajeel could not help, but think with a smirk, despite himself. He hadn't told his old friend yet, as agreed, because he had wanted to keep his promise to Levy. In time though… He thought, hoping for something good to come out of all of this.

Gajeel closed his eyes and angled his head down… I'm gettin' ahead of myself here… He then thought, opening his eyes and staring at the black slate bathroom floor. She might not… He thought, but the words fell off in his mind, as he didn't want to think about it. He reached for a towel, getting annoyed with himself for getting excited, as his stomach continued to twist with fear and uncertainty.

"Gajeel, it sounds like, she might feel the same way as you… Don't you see that?" Came Lily's questioning voice, chiming in his head once again and he frowned.

Yea… But what if she doesn't…? His thoughts questioned, as he looked at his one open hand, it was quivering just a little bit. His nerves were truly doing a number on him. Never in his life, could he recall being so nervous about anything, that he was visibly shaking. He hadn't ever had a reason to be, as he had never let his hopes get this high before. Life hadn't ever allowed him too; as one disappointment after another, had set a certain tone to the way Gajeel had lived and carried on. He had learned early on, that there was no point, or so he had thought at least.

"You've had it hard, Gajeel… You've had a hard life… So, trust me when I say, it's about time something good comes along for you…" Came Lily's words once more.

I guess… Gajeel thought in response, his brain mulling over everything he had endured since that day. The day he had been remembering. He closed his eyes and took in the air, deeply with his nose, before exhaling the breath out slowly. I am just, tired… Tired of being disappointed… He realized, probably for the first time ever.

It wasn't something he normally allowed himself to feel. He had tried now, for so long, to be strong and to never betray any amount of self-pity, sadness, or hurt, as these were all signs of weakness, but they also weren't emotions that he could run away from for forever.

Just keep moving forwards… No matter what happens, keep on going, and being alive… Become stronger, so that you can ensure that you do stay alive. This had been the mantra that had kept him going for this long. Gajeel opened his eyes, a thought coming to mind as his past continued to roll through his mind, in ways he hadn't allowed it to for ages.

Maybe it has been… Kind of hard… He finally admitted to himself. Opening the floodgates in a way that he had never intended, for the rest of the day.

She had been calling, probably every two hours to no avail. She had even suspected the station of screening her calls after the second day. She had tried to email, but that had only resulted in a chain of emails, with people forwarding her messages along to somebody who couldn't help her and thus, didn't really matter. She had driven down to the station on multiple occasions, only to be told each and every time, that the captain was not available for her to speak too.

"How is that even possible?!" Juvia questioned the man at reception in complete and utter outrage. Now, during her fifth attempt to try and meet with Captain Erza Scarlett. "She isn't on vacation, or on leave?! Does this woman, just not come to work?!"

"Sorry counselor, I have no idea why the captain hasn't been here. I am just reporting to you, what has been reported to me." The man in uniform, behind the glass replied. Juvia looked to him with a desperate shine in her eyes.
"Well, is there any way you can tell me, when she will be here... It is really important that I speak to her and it cannot wait any longer." She pleaded.

"Sorry mam, I really don't know." The man spoke.

"Please…" Juvia begged, her hands clamoring onto the small counter right outside the window. "You don't understand… I have been trying to reach her for days now… And nobody has been able to relay anything for me…" She bowed her head. "If you can't help me, then I don't know what I am going to do…" She explained.

"Sorry…" The man spoke, looking elsewhere. The guilt was evident in his eyes.

"Well, is there somebody else I can speak to, then? Or maybe, can I wait in her office for her to return?" Juvia pleaded once more, clearly desperate.

"You are more than welcomed to do that counselor, but I have a strong feeling that you will be waiting around all day." The man spoke as Juvia stood back up straight. She looked to him for a moment, trying to decide.

But if I don't even try… I might as well wrap a noose around my neck… She then thought with a small cringe, before finally sighing and closing her eyes. She then opened them and asked,

"Okay… Let me come in... Where is it?"

Gray was standing in the breakroom, practically rocking on his feet with exhaustion as he waited within the confines of a short line, for some much-needed coffee and a doughnut, from a box someone had brought in. He listened with his head angled up and his eyes on the ceiling, as several of his coworkers chatted around him, about topics he didn't give a shit about.

Aw man… Come on… Hurry up people… His inner thoughts complained as he let out a breath, his eyes rolling before a deep yawn followed suit. He was tired and sick of being on his feet. It had been several days in a row, of nonstop working. Both Elfman and himself, doing days and nights together, in order to help Erza out during her absence.

Sleep had become scarce for the both of them, as they had barely even gotten to go home during that span; the two of them running on high amounts of caffeine and sugar. Although in this case, Gray couldn't bear to stomach something as sweet as a doughnut, on such little sleep. No, his position in line was more for the benefit of his partner, who was waiting at their desks and he would be sure to grab himself a coffee, before heading back.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity of waiting for people to move out of his way, Gray was stepping out of the breakroom. Warm percaline mug full of black liquid in one hand and pink frosted doughnut with sprinkles and a napkin, in the other. A small grin on his face, as he brought the mug up close to his lips. His nose taking in the steam with delight, as he closed his baggy eyes, to enjoy the sensation further. Worth it… He thought next, as he slowly brought the hot liquid to his mouth even while walking, as he could not stand the idea of waiting until he got back to his desk, to take a sip. He could not remember coffee ever tasting so good in his life, as it hit the back of his throat and warmed him on the way down. He let himself enjoy that feeling, as he approached the area of his desk, the booming, but tired voice of his partner reaching his ears.

"Wait a minute… So, who are you, again?" Elfman was questioning someone from a sitting position at his desk. Gray could see his partner's elbow resting on the surface, his large hand clamped over his forehead in distress and confusion, as he spoke to somebody that Gray could not yet see. Somebody
probably standing near the outside of Erza's office, based on the direction Elfman appeared to be looking.

Gray began to slow his pace, as his chest tightened and the hot coffee he had been drinking, sloshed around in his mouth, essentially burning him. A strange feeling of déjà vu, was coming over him, as if he somehow knew what he was going to find, once he stepped around the cubicle wall. He heard her voice and he could almost rehearse the words, as if he had witnessed her answer to his partner once before.

"My name is Juvia Lockser..." Gray watched her say, stopping in his tracks just as he had stepped into view. "And I am here to meet with the captain, Erza Scarlet." Gray swallowed his coffee audibly in one large gulp. His eyes widening, as Juvia kept her devoid stare on his partner for the moment. She had yet to notice him, as he stood somewhere within her peripheral vision, though she was clearly aware of someone's presence behind her. She had no reason to believe it was somebody of significance just yet, so she did not bother to spare him a glance.

"Uhh... Well... Sorry, Juvia..." Elfman muttered. "But the captain isn't going to be in, as you can see..." He gestured towards the closed door of Erza's office, just to the left of where he was sitting. "She isn't here. So, you can wait all you want, but... I know she isn't coming." He finished, his exhaustion showing in the way that he spoke, as his voice was heavy and his words were slow.

Juvia stood there for a moment staring at Elfman, the fingers around the handles of her bag were tightening around the strap, as her knuckles began to turn white. She didn't move from her spot, but Gray could swear her posture was stiffening to the point, where she looked like she was trembling with anxiety, as her shoulders lifted just a little.

"Well..." She chimed, with the smallest hints of a shudder. "I... I will just... Wait here then..." She answered and that was when Gray knew for certain, as he could hear the rattle in her voice; she was afraid.

"What?" Elfman questioned her back, a bit flabbergasted. "Didn't you hear me, lady? She ain't comin' in today. I work under her, so I know this, for sure." He explained a bit annoyed.

"Well, that isn't good enough." Juvia snapped back, though her voice wasn't all that loud or mean, it just sounded more desperate. "I need to speak to her..." Juvia added in a drawn-out tone. "And it cannot wait."

"Juvia..." Gray finally spoke, after standing in silence for a moment to watch the exchange. He had stepped closer, as Juvia turned to look at him, with her mouth falling open in surprise. Her eyes widened once she realized it was Gray, who had been standing behind her the entire time. He did not smile, or greet her in a normal way. Instead he just stood there with his arms down at his sides. Still holding the items, he had brought with him, but paying them no attention. His eyes taking on a serious, yet grave expression. Elfman's brow pushed together in clear confusion as he witnessed the clear familiarity between the two.

"What's wrong?" Came the words finally, as Gray kept his eyes locked to hers. Juvia's eyebrows lifted in worry, as she took him in with a pause.

"Gray..." She spoke his name at last and Gray's lips pressed together, as he took another step towards her. "I... I wasn't expecting to see you here."

"It's okay..." He reassured her, with one more step near, now only a few feet away. "This here, is my partner." Gray gestured towards Elfman with his doughnut hand. "Elfman Strauss." He watched her steadily, as Juvia's eyes landed on Elfman once again, she then bowed her head in formal
"Nice to meet you..." She spoke to Elfman, her tone somber. "I apologize, for giving you a hard time..." She added, her sights lowering in guilt. Elfman's eyes widened at the action, before he then jumped out of his chair with a wave of his hands.

"No, no... Don't worry about it...!" He insisted a bit nervously as the woman looked damn near ready to cry, and if Gray was friends with her, he suddenly cared about her feelings. He rubbed the back of his head. "I shouldn't have been so rude. It wasn't very manly of me. I'm sorry... I'm just a little cranky today." He explained with a small bow of his head, to copy the very same she had done towards him. Once he stood back up straight, Gray was holding out the doughnut towards him. "Oh hey, thanks..." Elfman muttered quietly to his partner, as he took the pastry item from Gray's hand, but Gray had his eyes focused steadily over Juvia for the moment.

"Our superior, is captain Erza." Gray explained, as Juvia's mouth opened again, just ever so slightly at this bit of news.

"Oh, I see..." Juvia responded, her eyes going downcast once more. "I had no idea... I never put it together..."

"Don't worry about it." Gray chimed, earning her eyes back over him as he gave her a slight smirk, with a crossed brow. "Why would you, ya know?" He spoke, doing his best to sound confident, yet still friendly. Juvia could only stare at him, clearly caught off guard. "Now..." He spoke, becoming more serious again, as his smile vanished. "Tell me why you need to talk to her." Juvia stood there, for a moment with no response. Gray could swear she was paling, as her eyes glanced away from him again, but she was already so fare skinned, it was hard to say.

"It's urgent..." She finally uttered.

"Yea, I got that much..." He answered, watching her with an eyebrow going up. "And clearly, it has you pretty worried." He added, as he took her in. "I can see that, just by looking at you." Juvia glanced up to him quickly, her eyes shining as she was obviously upset.

"My employer..." She began, not even bothering to deny what Gray had noticed. She then paused, not wishing to tell him the rest. What would he think of her, once he knew? But then again, what choice did she have? She was running out of time and she didn't know what more she could do. "My employer is... Jose Porla." The words finally came out, as Juvia lowered her head in shame, her sights on the floor. The reveal caused Elfman to start choking on a piece of his doughnut, before he finally swallowed and coughed a bit.

"What?!" He got out, after a few coughs. "No way!" He finally managed. "Then we can't help you, lady! Why on earth would we want too?!" Elfman threw the question back at her, in clear outrage. "Your boss, is accusing us- This police station, of not only, 'not doing our jobs', but of flat out corruption, and it isn't even true! Not only that, but then he threatened us! Some man he is! Why should we help you, or anyone who works with him?!"

Gray stood there, his feet evenly panted on the floor as he stared at Juvia's bowed head. Elfman's voice was still yelling in the background of his mind, and that was when he knew he had worked it all out. He could feel it; a strange tingling inside of his stomach as he watched the ashamed woman before him, get yelled at. And it was telling him, that this... This moment, was his time.

The plan he had discussed with Erza was actually coming to fruition and the best part about it was, he hadn't even needed to go looking for her, in order to get it started. Juvia had instead come right to him, with little to no effort on his part and now he knew she needed his help.
He could feel a smirk wanting to form on his face at the clear opportunity he was being given, but he didn't allow for it to show. He instead just stood there, straight faced and cool, despite how eager he could feel himself becoming.

"I see..." Was all Gray said in response, once Elfman had finished speaking. Gray's head had lowered so that his eyes could not be seen, under the hair that reached messily over his forehead.

Juvia's head rose up some, but her eyes stayed down in shame, as she did not wish to see the spite upon his face. She could feel it hurting her heart, as she imagined what it would look like in her mind. All of his partner's words towards her, were completely true and they more than justified why Gray Fullbuster, should not want anything to do with her.

"So then... You are trying to speak to her, about the apology thing for your boss... Am I right?" She heard Gray ask her and she nodded, still refusing to look up.

"Yes..." She confirmed, her voice deep and sad.

There was silence as Juvia stood there, her body frozen and her mind in distress. If there was ever a time, she wished she could stop breathing, it was right then. She wanted more than anything, to disappear from that room as her heart felt like it was shattering into tiny pieces. Surely, Gray would hate her for this. Any hope she had ever had of winning him over, vanishing just like that, in a flash.

"Okay..." Gray finally answered. "Then I will help you." He added, his voice so light and gentle that Juvia could swear, her wish to stop breathing had come true, as she glanced up at him with complete and utter shock.

"What?!" Elfman bellowed out in confusion. Gray had the tiniest hints of a smile over his face as he looked over Juvia's, completely bewildered expression.

"You need the captain?" Gray asked again, his voice drenched in confidence. "Then I will get you one Erza Scarlett, right when you need her! I swear on it!" He exclaimed with a grin.

No way... Came Juvia's thoughts, as she could only stare at him, her heart pounding against her ribcage. Her face had flushed to a lovely pink, her mouth was hanging open in pleasant surprise. He really is willing to help me, even after everything?!

He really is just a nice guy... Isn't he? She thought, a hand settling over her chest to stifle the feeling of gratefulness she felt towards him, among other things.

The room had been quiet and warm as the sunlight of late afternoon continued to beat down through the window, shining over the one side of Jellal's face. His eyelids were squeezing tighter as the discomfort of both heat and brightness finally managed to stir him awake. His brow furrowed together upon opening his eyes and inspecting the familiar space. His body remained stationary on the bed, the realization that he knew where he was, but that he had no memory of how, or when he had arrived there was hitting him.

Spots had appeared in the corners of his vision due to the glare of light, as his eyes squinted and continued to dart around the room with confusion. The strain of his injured body was taking over, all at once. A ripping and pulsing pain that made him feel as though, there was no reason he should still be alive. His eyes slammed shut again upon feeling it, before opening back up slowly, only to finally land on the only thing of real significance to him; the profile of a beautiful woman's face.

She sat in a chair, some feet away from the end of the bed. Positioned near a desk, on the side of the
room with the windows. He hadn't been able to spot her right away, due to the glare of light that had been hiding her from him. Her eyes were fixated out the window that was nearest to her, her long scarlet hair practically aglow from the sunlight that was flowing in, as it hung loosely over her shoulders. The line of her brow held a strong edge, as it inclined smoothly into her feminine nose. She had a hand curled over her mouth, as she leaned onto it for support, her elbow resting against the desk as she stared out, unaware that she was now being watched.

Jellal opened his mouth, in an attempt to use his voice and call out to her. He again could feel the strain on his chest and stomach in doing so. Just breathing was painful, but speaking was a whole a different animal. It felt like he hadn't moved his jaw in ages.

"Erza…" He finally managed with a very haggard and weak voice. Erza was on her feet right away, her head going up in his direction, as her arms swung down to her sides. She was wearing a black tank top and a small pair of shorts, normal sleep attire for her. Her eyes looked melancholily, as they took him in with surprise.

Jellal immediately felt the urge to comfort her, his body suddenly shifting in an attempt to sit up. His shoulders rolling, but his face was contorting in extreme pain, as a half breath and groan filtered out of his mouth. Erza was at his side in seconds, sitting on the edge of the mattress beside him, as she rested both of her hands gently over his shoulders, keeping him down and still, very carefully.

"Now, now…" She told him gently. "No moving…" She demanded, though her voice had a certain soothing quality, one could acquaint it to sounding almost motherly. Jellal's movements settled, his neck and back sliding into place upon feeling the pressure of her hands. His eyes opened and he looked up at her, another breathe panting out. Her eyes still looked sad, yet somehow calm. "You are still recovering and you will be, for some time…" She added, in an attempt to talk some sense into him.

"Erza…" Jellal spoke weakly again, everything having come back to him, the minute he had laid eyes on her.

"Yes?" She questioned him, her expression stoic.

"You mean to tell me… I really survived that…?" He questioned, his gaze falling away from her face. He could not seem to wrap his head around how he had managed it and Erza could not fight the tiny relived smile, that came over her lips at his question.

"So, it seems…" She replied, still smiling. Meanwhile Jellal's sights had landed over the elbow crease of Erza's one arm, as he had noticed some cotton and medical tape over the spot. His one hand started to slowly lift from the bed, the tips of his fingers just grazing over the area of her bandage. Erza glanced down at the hand, he had now settled over her arm.

"Why…? Did you…?" He questioned, his weak voice dying altogether, speaking was so painful. Erza's opposite hand then rested over Jellal's and his eyes went up to hers.

"You know why…" She spoke gently. "And yes… I gave you some of my blood…" Jellal could only stare at her, his exhaustion showing as Erza continued to smile down at him.

"You shouldn't have done that…" He replied. "You need to be at your best…" He panted. "Your strongest…" He explained through a breath.

"I wouldn't be… If you had died…" Erza answered. "Don't you see…? Your life is precious…" Her hand wrapped around his more securely, as she said this. Her thumb rubbing the top of his knuckles. "You need to see the value in it… As I do… So, you don't go throwing it away…" She told him,
Jellal kept his gaze on their hands.

"I can't ever give you what you want..." He whispered, refusing to meet her eye. The regret was there, staining his voice and expression. Erza bowed her head, forcing him to make eye contact with her.

"You're wrong..." She stated. "As long as you're here... And you are a part of my life, then I have everything I could ever want..." Jellal glanced away from her at that, contemplating her words.

He understood her and believed that she meant what she said, but to him, it would never be enough. She deserved more, she deserved marriage and the happy family she never got as a kid. He knew deep down, that she had such dreams, even if she wasn't speaking them to him now.

"Erza... How long have I been here?" He finally questioned, wishing to drop the subject as it made him feel miserable. Erza raised her head some.

"It's been a few days now, since I found you here... Makarov's friend Porlyusica, is the one who saved your life."

"No..." Jellal answered abruptly, looking back up to her. "It was you..." He replied with his raspy voice. "It's always been you... Since the beginning..." He added, his eyes closing. "You're the only reason I am still here, always..." His voice was beginning to weaken as Erza kept a steady gaze over him. She could see him wanting to fall back into sleep.

"Yes... Just rest for now..." She spoke to him, as her hand reached up to the touch the side of his face. "This is the first time you've woken up... But you need to save your strength..." She spoke with a soft caress to his cheek, before taking her hand away, so that he may sleep in peace.

"You have it wrong Jellal..." She told him, her head shaking. "You are the only reason, that I am still here..." She answered watching him for a silent moment, her mind drifting to the past and the day that Jellal had rescued her from her adoptive father. "Always..." She whispered, glancing back towards the window.

She sat there for a moment in the quiet. A victim of memory until the sound of her phone on the desk, sounded off, interrupting her thoughts. Erza got to her feet slowly, careful as to not disturb the now sound asleep Jellal, as she headed back towards where she had been sitting. There she glanced down at her vibrating phone, Gray's name was scrolled across the screen. Erza picked it up and hit the answer button upon seeing the name.

"Hey Gray, what's going on?" She questioned upon answering.

"Hey Capt..." Gray answered, staring through the blinds and window of Erza's office, to glance at Juvia who was now waiting in the other room with their desks and Elfman. He had closed himself up inside, so that he could call Erza and they would not be overheard, but he still felt uneasy. And so, he spoke quietly and kept his eyes glued to Jose's unsuspecting attorney, through the glass. "How's our friend doing?"

"Better..." Erza answered, glancing back towards the sleeping Jellal as she spoke. "He finally woke up, for a few minutes, but he just fell back to sleep again, like two minutes ago."

"Oh, well that's good news..." Gray answered, taking his hands away from the blinds he had been stretching. Elfman and Juvia seemed to be making small talk, which surprised him to say the least, after the little fit Elfman had just thrown, once he had figured out who Juvia was.

"How are things going there?" Erza then asked.
"We're tired, but things are running okay, nothing you need to worry about really. We got it all under control…” Gray explained.

"Sorry… I really hate that you and Elfman are running yourselves ragged…” Erza apologized, sounding truly regretful. "I really appreciate everything though… I can't thank you two enough…”

"Psh… Don't worry about it Erza… You got enough on your plate… Really.” Gray spoke, there was a pause as Erza contemplated it and Gray took that opportunity to speak again. "But speaking of things, you need to take care of…” His voice faded, as he spread the blinds with his fingers, to land an eye on Juvia again.

"What is it?” She questioned

"Remember that plan, we talked about…? The one I'm not supposed to tell anybody about…?” Gray questioned, his voice leaning.

"Yea…?” Erza replied, her tone matching Gray's with expectancy.

"Well, she's here… And she needs, you…” Gray explained.

"Me…?” Erza questioned. "Isn't she supposed to want you…?” Erza questioned, a smirk coming across her face and Gray could recognize that she was teasing him, by the sound of her voice.

"Ha ha… Very funny.” He responded sarcastically, turning away from the blinds once again. "She's after your apology, for Jose… And I told her I would help her out.”

"Ohhh… Right…” Erza responded, feigning ignorance.

"So, have you written it?” Gray questioned, as Erza's eyes moved up to the ceiling of her loft.

"Not exactly… I haven't really made it a priority the last few days…” Erza answered, not sounding all that sorry about it, and Gray pinched the bridge of his nose.

"That's what I was afraid of…” Gray answered with a huff.

"Is it really a big deal?” She questioned, her tone sincere this time.

"Apparently it is…” Gray answered, glancing up at Juvia again. "She keeps saying she is 'running out of time' and she seems to be very worried…” Gray sighed, shifting his eyes away from Juvia who had been smiling and laughing at Elfman. "I was kinda thinking, if you helped me out with this, it would score me a lot of points in her favor… Just telling her I would help, sure seemed too, based on the look I saw on her face.”

"I see…” Erza replied and Gray felt like he could hear the judgment in her voice and the disappointment.

"Look… Erza… I'm sorry.” He shrugged, feeling like an ass for asking such a thing of her right now. "I didn't want to bother you about this, but this woman is desperate… I honestly think she is scared…”

"It's okay, Gray…” Erza assured him, sensing that he was becoming a bit upset. "She probably is afraid… Knowing Jose… And besides… This is something I have to do anyways…” Erza glanced down at her bare feet. "We might as well, at least use it to our advantage in some way, if we can.” Gray let his head fall back again.
"Well, it has to be you, to write and deliver this apology to the press tonight... Because that's what Jose wants... Or at least, that's what she has told me." Gray again felt like sighing, but Erza did it for him.

"That doesn't surprise me really... And I don't mind anyways... Not after everything you have been doing for me lately, but..." She looked to Jellal, a frown over her face, contemplating what she could do. "Tell you what..." She suddenly said, "What time is that broadcast supposed to be?"

"7:00p.m. tonight, at city hall." Gray answered.

"Alright... I'll be there..." Erza answered, her voice lowering with determination.

"You will?" Gray questioned.

"Yes, just tell her that... Sound good?" Erza questioned.

"Uh... Yea... Okay... But how are you going to manage it? You haven't even started it, right?" Gray asked.

"Just trust me..." She explained. "I've done a lot more, in a lot less time before... So, don't even worry about that part... Now, I got to go and get this done, so I'll see you later tonight, okay?" She questioned.

"Uh... Okay, yea... See you then..." As soon as the words left Gray's mouth, the phone hung up, leaving Gray to stare at it, in his hand with curiosity. He knew Erza had something up her sleeve, but what it could be, he hadn't any clue.

Erza hung up the phone and let her arm fall back down at her side as she held the device. She glanced up to Jellal again, a smirk over her face.

Don't worry Jellal... I won't let your message go unheard... But first I'm going to need a certain hot head's help, in order to pull off what I am thinking... She watched him, her hand lifting back up, and automatically finding a number without the use of her eyes.

And also...

The phone was ringing already as she brought it up to her ear, her eyes still on the sleeping man in her bed.

"Hello?" A woman's voice answered the phone.

"Hello Mira... You guys up for a meeting tonight...?"

The rain had arrived unexpected and hard, a regular downpour that overflowed the gutters of the street and pelted the ground with noise cancelling velocity. Gajeel stood within the confines of a parking garage, his head facing one of the entryways, as the rain continued to fall outside. The water was streaming over the concrete, soaking the soles of his boots as it slid down the slopes of each aisle in gushing waves. The spray in the air was unavoidable as it reached his face, despite his hood being up. The rest of his body was uncovered, as he had only been able to put his arm through one sleeve of his zip up hoodie, due to his sling being in the way.

Gajeel was very much alone as he waited. Standing quite still, despite the chill of stormy winds as they swept inside the garage with surprising force, due to the tunnel like walls that surrounded him. It was mostly dark inside, as the above lighting was not very effective against the sinister clouds of outside. He was keeping his gaze forwards, towards the graying light of the doorway, focused securely on absolutely nothing. Just simply mesmerized by the droplets that rained down and then bounced off of the pavement of the street.
He was marked with the simple task of waiting and he had been at it for some time, due to his own impatience. The weather having put him on high alert, and causing him to step outside much sooner than he had initially planned, out of concern. His frown staying firmly locked in place as he glanced around, before looking back ahead. The fear that he might miss something, was there. Making it hard for him to relax.

*Back to waiting... As always...* Came his thoughts as he closed his eyes and sighed. His patience having already thinned considerably and he was riddled with a form of anxiety, that he hadn't felt in years. After always being told and expected to wait around in his youth, only to be disappointed, Gajeel had made it a point in his life, going forwards to be a person of action and not patience.

He normally didn't 'wait' for anything, unless it was an absolute necessity. His instinct was to remain ever vigilant and to remind himself of the cost of waiting too long. The price for doing nothing and acting only once it was too late, was a hefty one indeed.

Gajeel's eyes opened, his heart striking the cage of his bones, much harder than usual as he could feel the soreness in his throat building. *I don't wanna be stuck here, in this position- Ever again...* Came his thoughts as his eyes glazed over, his mind stretching back.

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It had been four days. Four whole days since Metallicana had walked out of the cabin they were staying in, one morning shortly after sunrise and had not returned. At the time of his leaving, he had promised he would eventually come back, but Gajeel hadn't seen nor heard a word from his father since.

At first it hadn't seemed like a big deal to the boy, as his father would often step out for long periods of time. Sometimes all day, rarely overnight, but it had happened on the odd occasion. Normally not without warning, but there may have been at least one time where an overnight outing hadn't been expected. Gajeel hadn't been able to remember; things like that had never bothered him before as he had always trusted his father to come back and without fail, he always did.

On the second morning of Metalicana's absence, Gajeel awoke to find no sign of his father having returned, but it hadn't bothered him too much at the time. Not until the sun had started to go down, at least.

Somewhere between mid-day to evening, the boy could feel a sinking feeling settling within his heart, as the worry began to plague him. They were reaching into unfamiliar territory, as his father had never not returned, for a second night in a row.

It had been difficult for Gajeel to find sleep that night, as he had kept stirring awake on the couch in the main room, only to glance up at the front door. Just waiting for any sign or sound that his father was approaching the deck of the cabin, to no avail.

On the third day, Gajeel had been restless and sleep deprived. Finally, having become worried, it had made it incredibly hard for him to sit still or relax at any capacity. He instead spent most of his day pacing around the cabin, as he could think of nothing to distract himself, from the sudden disappearance of his father. The only thing that had kept him in the house, was a particular reminder of his father's words.

'*Gajeel... If there ever comes a time where I am not home... Just stay inside and keep the door locked... Keep the house secure and just wait... Wait, for me to return...'*

Gajeel looked to the window, his head angling to the side as he remembered the seriousness in his father's voice, as he had relayed those words to him. The look of warning on Metalicana's face, had
been almost alarming, but right now, all Gajeel could do was question the validity of such an instruction, when faced with the current scenario he was dealing with.

_Yea dad… But what if you don't come back…?_ Came the question, Gajeel kept finding himself asking, throughout the day. Basically, every time he tried to ponder a solution to the current dilemma.

Finally, at some point, late into the night, probably around 2 a.m., Gajeel had worried himself so weary, that he did fall asleep again. Sadly, his dreams were so riddled with horrifying images of monsters and wild animals attacking his father in the middle of the woods, that it was hardly a peaceful night's rest for the boy. The stress and fear continued to weigh on him for the next several hours, only worsening as more time passed.

Finally, on the fourth day, Gajeel awoke late into the afternoon with a start. His panic forthcoming, as he quickly realized with great devastation that Metallicana still had not returned to the cabin. At this point, the loneliness and fear had made itself at home inside of him. The feeling was like that of a chunk of ice, burning the insides of his chest and stomach, painful and cold.

His bare feet were settled on the wooden floor of the cabin, as he stared at the front door, well into the evening. His body becoming like a statue, unable to decide or do anything; frozen with the fear and the helplessness of not knowing. Just wishing and praying to some higher power that the door would suddenly move and open. Hoping against his better judgment, that he would see the familiar smirk of his father, as he sauntered inside and greeted Gajeel with an apology for being so long, and then tease him for being so scared, but none of it ever happened. Every scenario Gajeel imagined, meant nothing and only led to more disappointment, as he continued to be let down by the stillness of his surroundings.

He had stood there for hours, most of the day in fact. His feet and legs were hurting and his stomach was howling at him, but he could not bring himself to eat anything. The worry and fear had stretched into a kind of desperation, where he soon realized he could no longer just sit and wait. And so, he decided right then as evening arrived, he would go looking for his father.

Gajeel started putting on his shoes and a coat, gearing up for the weather and the cold of outside. Taking with him, a flashlight, that he knew his father had stored in the closet, before heading out into the woods alone. His search had already begun as the sun started to set.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Gajeel could hear the voice of his father warning him to not do, as he just had. The 'wait for me to return' echoing through his mind and making him want to cry, as he just didn't know what more he could do.

"I can't dad…" Gajeel mumbled to himself, his eyes glossing over with tears as he trudged through the forest around the cabin. "I wanted to listen… But I have to find you… This is so stupid…"

Soon the blackness of night had settled around him, causing the fear within him to build ever higher, as his flashlight darted around the woods. Illuminating the ground of the forest, an area littered with dead leaves, broken trees and sticks all around. The distant sounds of twigs snapping and leaves rumbling, often causing the boy to jump, as he ventured onwards through the night. His young body twisting around quickly, to shine his light on nothing, but more dense woods.

_Dad… I don't want to be out here…_ Came his thoughts. _But I don't know what else to do… I just want to find you… I just want to be sure you are okay…_ Came the rest of his thoughts, as his heart continued to pound into his throat. His desperation being the only motivation to keep his feet moving forwards, through the cold and darkness. All of the fantasies and dreams he had been having, about his father being attacked, now coming back into his mind, as he imagined the very same scenarios happening to himself.
As the night wore on, Gajeel found that any shred of hope he had, had of finding his dad, was slowly dissipating. His efforts all seeming completely useless, as he had found no sign of his father. And with no idea of where, or why his father had left in the first place, he had absolutely nothing to go on or to help him find a starting place, other than the surrounding woods. Instead all he had was the image of his father standing in the bright open doorway, smirking at him before he left.

After a while longer, the sun was starting to come up and Gajeel was now exhausted and depressed. At some point, as morning had neared, he had started to recognize certain surroundings as the skies went from black to gray and had started to head back towards the cabin, as he was at a loss to do anything else. His trek back was slow, as he dragged his feet and sulked nearly the whole trip. He was past the point of tears and too exhausted for anything else beyond that, as well.

About an hour into the sunrise Gajeel had finally arrived back at the clearing where the cabin was. At first paying little to no attention, until something strange became apparent. The front door of the cabin was currently wide open and Gajeel knew he hadn't left it that way. His father had always warned him, not to do such a thing, once again reminding him of the dangers.

Gajeel immediately smiled, thinking at last, his father had finally come home while he was gone and began running towards the house, full throttle. He's probably looking for me! Came his thoughts, as he neared the door.

"Dad! Dad!" He called, flooding through the open doorway. "Dad! Your back!" He exclaimed, his excitement apparent as a large figure came into view, but as Gajeel approached, he immediately stopped in his tracks. The realization that this person was much too wide to be his father occurring to him. "Dad?" The word had slipped out once more with confusion, but as the man turned around to face him, Gajeel knew even as he had said it, that he had been wrong.

The person who was now facing him, was a very tall and wide man. He had a dark complexion and a large smile over his face. There were sunglasses over his face, hiding his eyes and a hat over his apparently bald head.

'And Gajeel… If ANYONE, ever tries to come in or does get into the house, when I am not there… You gotta run… And call the police as soon as you can… Just remember that… 911…' Came Metalicana's voice once more in Gajeel's ears, as he stood before the large man practically cowering in his shadow.

"Are you looking for your father…?" Came the strange man's deep voice, as his body bent forwards, towards the boy, his face still smiling. "That's so sad…." The man added and that was when Gajeel knew he needed to escape.

He took several steps back, before making a leap towards the left. Nearly falling, as his feet sprung to life, dashing away, his eye catching the phone and the door. The indecision of what he should try and do first, causing him to slow down. Call for help or just run?

Unfortunately, that little bit of hesitation was all of the time the stranger needed to catch up to the boy. Gajeel could not remember much after the feeling of his chin, slamming against the wooden floor of the cabin. He knew something large and heavy had toppled over him and then there had been nothing, but darkness.

Gajeel had his head angled down, his stare was now settled over the puddles that surrounded his feet. The sound of the rain and the low rumbles of thunder, were suddenly becoming loud again as they drowned out the rest of his thoughts with their noise. His brow hardened around his eyes and he scoffed. His teeth clamping down in frustration as the memory began to fade.
Fuck you Aria… Came his first thoughts in response; his anger forthcoming. He had to remind himself to calm down and let it go. His eyelids lowered, as he shifted on his feet and swallowed with a releasing breath of air.

Why do I gotta keep… His head angled down, before his thoughts continued. Thinkin' about that…? He questioned next with a tilt of his head, huffing to himself. His sights moving up towards the ridged ceiling of the garage, only to land on the dim flickering lights above him.

Gajeel was tired of reliving the past, though it was something that was never far from his mind. It had driven him for the majority of his life, but that did not mean he often found himself reliving it moment by moment, as he seemed to be doing today. More so, he had always just treated it as a scar. Something that was ever present; with the knowledge of its existence being more than enough, for one to be wise when encountering a similar situation, but not something they often found themselves dwelling on in their everyday life.

Gajeel's gaze shifted down to the sling over his arm with a frown. His eyes landing right in the position where he knew his scars to be. From there, he did best to put everything he had been thinking about, out of his mind despite his heart's insistence. It became rather easy only seconds later, as something had caught the corner of his eye. Finally, a worthy distraction from his rattling thoughts and memories.

He turned his head back up towards the entryway of the garage, where the rain was still coming down hard. The light of day had dimmed considerably, but it was still bright enough for him to make out a figure, just outside as they approached the doorway. Gajeel could not bring himself to move upon instantly recognizing the stature and build of the person who was coming towards him. He also could not make out their face, as it was concealed by the hood of a windbreaker coat, a familiar bag hanging from their shoulder.

Don't just stand there, idiot… His mind reprimanded himself, as he still hadn't bothered to move. Finally gaining the courage he needed to take a step in her direction, if only to meet her part ways. His nerves having been responsible for his initial hesitation. He walked up towards her, his large boots splashing with each step as she approached him in return.

Upon closer inspection, he could see the damp strands of blue hair that spiraled out from underneath her hood and the shine of raindrops that had settled all over the dark coat she was wearing, like tiny gem fragments engraved into dark stone. He swallowed deeply, making a true effort to make himself appear perfectly calm and cool, despite how he was really feeling on the inside, a jumbled mess.

Once the two of them were within a few feet of each other, they both paused and Gajeel used that as an opportunity to take in her appearance. She had been wearing tight jeans, that were tucked into a pair of black women's combat boots. She also seemed to have some kind of long sweater on, as he could just make out the hem of something from underneath her coat, but unfortunately, she also appeared to be pretty soaked.

He glanced up at her face, he could spot her nose and the slight freckles over her cheeks. Her eyes were visible, though the shadow of her hood made them harder to see in the already dark garage. And lastly, to his surprise she was smiling, though it was weak it was also apparent and he could swear it was reaching her eyes, as her gaze hung over him.

Her small white hands poked out from the sleeves of her coat and began to reach up, grabbing either side of her hood and pulling it back, so that he could finally lay eyes on the entirety of her face. Her hair was slightly tasseled and damp from the beginnings of the downpour.

Gajeel felt his mouth open for a moment as though he had wanted to speak, but he could not think of
what he was possibly going to say. His eyes darted down for a mere fraction of a second, before he found his composure again, swallowing dryly a second time. He had to remind himself that despite realizing how he felt about her; that this was the very same Levy he had always known. For nearly four years in fact, and so there wasn't any reason he should behave any different.

*Besides... How long have you probably loved this girl now...?* Gajeel's mind was suddenly questioning, as his head rose up. *Probably since forever, right?* His brain contributed, as Gajeel was still unable to deduce the exact moment when his feelings for Levy had changed, or evolved. Those feelings had clearly crept up on him at some point, but he would never understand how or when it had happened.

All the while he was thinking this, he was also achieving eye contact with her.

*That's right...* Came the answer, a familiar feeling of nostalgia sinking into his chest. His lips automatically spreading into a sincere smile, *Levy...* His mind repeated her name with such care. *The old lady was right about me...* His mind continued, as if speaking to her. *I am a fool... I know it... but...* He thought, his fangs flashing, as he watched her lovely face light up. *I really am glad, I get to see you again...*

"Hey shrimp..." He finally greeted her, the familiarity having been achieved once again, but now with something special reserved for only the two of them. Gajeel felt like he had just arrived home after a hard day's work, but this time accompanying him was a warmth in his chest, that he hadn't felt, since he was a child in the limelight of his parent's gaze. His comfort levels had grown to new heights. The waves inside, now felt less like nerves and more like spasms of excitement instead; and it was all, because of her. She was that special to him and he was so happy. Something he hadn't recalled being in a lifetime.

"Hello Gajeel..." Levy finally greeted him back, her smile growing in much the same fashion as his own. He watched her, his eyes going over her whole form in a quick scan that she did not shy away from, like in years past.

"What the heck happened?" Gajeel suddenly gasped. "Yer soaked!" He added bluntly and Levy glanced down at herself, before looking back up towards him, her eyes holding a glow from the lights above.

"Yea..." She agreed with a tiny sigh. "Looks that way..." She laughed, before meeting his eye again. "I had no idea it was going to rain like this... I was not prepared."

"Ya coulda waited, ya know..." Gajeel suddenly spoke up, causing Levy's smile to vanish, as she looked up towards his face. Not seeming to understand what he meant. "To meet..." He clarified. "Ya coulda waited, till the rain blew over... You didn't have to come here, as soon as you were free from class and get stuck in this shit..." Gajeel explained, gesturing towards the entrance. Levy watched him for a moment, quickly realizing that he must have felt bad.

"I know... But I wanted too..." She answered glancing down, making Gajeel's eyes widen. "And it was what we had agreed upon, anyways... I didn't want to keep you waiting, or make you worry about me. And... I don't have a way to contact you, so... This was just easier." She explained. "And besides..." She then added suddenly, something else occurring to her. She glanced back up to catch his stare once again. "A little bit of rain never hurt anyone." She finished gently, her sights lowering back down to the ground. Gajeel glanced away at that, a small smirk tugging at the corner of his lips, despite his attempt to hide it.

"Yea, I get that..." He answered softly, before continuing. "I guess yer right... But." He spoke, trying to hide how happy her answer had made him as he changed the subject. He looked back down
at her, his good hand reaching down. "C'mon…" He spoke, offering it towards her with a serious look in his eye. Levy looked to his offering hand, before glancing up towards his face again. "Ya gotta be freezing… Let's hurry up and get you inside…" He suggested, his voice sincere.

Levy stared at him for a moment, her mouth falling open. She then nodded slowly, taking Gajeel's hand into her own. He closed his fingers gently around hers, before turning to lead the way. They made their way through the garage quickly, Gajeel's steps were long and sweeping, but he kept himself from getting too far ahead. Levy was watching him with wonder, only making note of the fact that he was still holding her hand.

It was strange, and vaguely reminiscent of the morning they had been in front of her apartment, when he had held her hand, as they walked away from their cab. That day he had been trying to tell her goodbye, but then she had requested he stay with her for the night.

Levy's mind remained there on that day, for a time. Now, much like then, she found herself at a loss on how to react. Her heart was beating frantically; though, she knew that was also in due part, because of where they were headed. She glanced around at their surroundings in bewilderment, finding it hard to not notice certain details even as they moved. For example, the vast number of expensive cars that surrounded them was unlike anything she had ever seen before. With the majority of them easily being on the high end of the thousands of dollars mark. This was just based on Levy's guess and what Jet, her car enthusiastic friend, had taught her. The concept of being in such a place, was hard for her to fathom, especially knowing Gajeel of all people, lived there.

She glanced up at him once more, as she had nearly stumbled after not paying attention and letting Gajeel pull her in a direction she was not prepared to go. Luckily, she had caught herself, before he could even notice the falter in her step, but it did cause her to bring her head up and watch him more carefully. Something else just occurring to her as she did this, the fluidity of his steps.

"Gajeel… Your leg…" She finally spoke up, as the two of them kept on walking. "It seems like you have healed up? You're not having any trouble walking…" She added, as they approached a set of glass doors, that led to the inside of a small and brightly lit elevator room. Gajeel came to a stop in front of the doors, letting go of Levy's hand to reach inside of his pockets and pull out a key card. He glanced down to unlock the door, speaking as he did so.

"Yea…" There was a beep and a green light, and then Gajeel was pulling on the handle, swiveling it down and opening the door. "Still feels stiff sometimes, but more so just after sitting down… Pain isn't really much of anythin' anymore, I don't really notice it." He explained, before looking up towards her with the door open, waiting for her to step inside. "Still don't wanna take the stairs though. Doctor's orders and such…" He added with a smirk in her direction.

"Not sure what you want me to say… If you didn't do as I said, you'd very likely end up back with Porlyusica again." She spoke while stepping into the small lobby, towards the elevators and she heard Gajeel laugh.

"Gi hi! Nahhh. You can save that tall old bat for somebody who really needs her... I much prefer my tiny doctor. I'll even be good, if it means I get ta keep her around." She heard Gajeel respond, as he followed suit.
The distinct click of the door relocking, sounded off as he approached the elevator beside her. Levy kept her eyes down, as Gajeel hit the button on the wall beside the door. They both watched in pause as it lit up and the noise of the doors shifting began.

"I would prefer that too..." Levy finally spoke, though her voice was quiet, Gajeel still heard her. His mouth fell open a bit and his eyes eased in subtle surprise. He stole a sideways glance at Levy, her gaze was on him in much the same fashion as his own, but her expression seemed worried, as though she were asking him with her eyes, to 'be careful' and to 'not get hurt again.' He held her gaze for a moment, before his lip curled up and he turned his body partially towards her.

"It's alright..." He reassured her, with as much comfort as he could give. He watched her, he could see her eyebrows coming together. "But... Why don't we..." He began, suddenly reaching towards the top of her head. Levy's eyes followed his hand, until he gently touched the hood of her coat. His fingers pulling it back up, and over her head, to shield her face once again. His hand then settled on top of her head, just resting there against the nylon of her coat's hood, in another sign of comfort. "Keep that up... At least until we get inside." He explained, still staring down at her, with his hand resting over her head. She watched him with curiosity set in her expression.

"You think that is necessary?" She questioned, truly unaware if he was worried.

"Probably not." He answered bluntly, finally removing his hand from her head. He looked back towards the door in front of them, as a ding sounded off. "But it will give me peace of mind..." He added quietly and Levy shifted her glance towards the elevator doors, just as they opened. The two of them stepped inside the elevator, in silence, before Gajeel made his way near the console. Levy stood across from him, as he faced the buttons.

"Look this way." He demanded and she glanced up towards him. "I just want you to remember this..." He explained, his hand purposely hovering over which button to press, before he touched it.

"Twenty-five?" Levy questioned, as Gajeel turned back to face her. Her hip was jutting out as she folded her arms. "You are that high up...? How did you think you were going to climb all of those stairs, that night?" She then asked, an eyebrow shooting up at him.

"Normally, I do it all of the time..." He responded with a smirk, leaning back against the wall, as the elevator began to move. "It's a good work out for me, before bed or in the morning... Ya know, whenever people aren't awake."

"Yea well... Maybe under different circumstances..." Levy replied flatly, gesturing towards his leg and Gajeel laughed a bit at this remark, his head lowering and shaking.

"Well no... Yer right in that case... But my head wasn't exactly on straight that night." He replied as Levy stared at him. Her lip curved up at his response, as her sights lowered off of his face.

Mine wasn't either... She couldn't help, but think, as her tiny smile vanished. I don't know that it has been, since... Her mind then added, as she glanced down at her own feet, before looking back up at Gajeel who was speaking again.

"I ain't about to try that again. Not anytime soon, so no need ta worry yer self over me shrimp." He smirked.

"Well..." Levy responded, her eyes moving towards the ceiling of the elevator as she turned her head away. "Seems impossible not to." She pressed her back against the wall, as Gajeel watched her. A frown back over his face as he contemplated her words and noticed her posture, the hood still over her head.
"Yer not the only one who feels that way..." He finally spoke, gaining her eyes back over him. They stared at one another for a moment without speaking. Levy taking in the seriousness of his expression. She was about to say something in return, when finally, the elevator came to a halt and the door opened. "C'mon." Gajeel spoke again, his lip curving.

The two of them stepped outside of the elevator, Levy walking slowly behind Gajeel as she took in the hallway that surrounded them. It was just a small lobby or waiting area, but to say it was impressive, was an understatement. The floor was a shiny golden marble, the walls were half paneled with intricate trim, and then covered with wallpaper the rest of the way up towards the ceiling, where there was a small chandelier hanging above them. The chairs were made with creamy colored fabric and cherry wood finishing on the legs. There were matching end tables beside the chairs, with glass laid out in the center of their tabletops.

Levy was following Gajeel in a daze, not really noticing that they were headed towards another set of elevators, until they stopped before them. These elevators looking considerably fancier than the last ones, that they had just encountered from the garage. They were almost mirror-like, with wide double doors and gold reflections staring back at them. Gajeel touched the button and glanced down at Levy.

"Now you'll know my pain." He stated as Levy looked up at him perplexed. Her mouth was hanging open, but the elevator arrived before she could even ask what he was referring to, the speed having surprised her. The doors opened and Gajeel threw out an arm for her to step inside first. She looked to him with confusion, but stepped inside regardless. He followed suit and then stepped towards the buttons, but there was only six.

"Twenty-eight." He stated, touching the button and then turning towards her with a sigh as the console lit up. "So, ya get it?" But Levy could only stare at him, completely put off and she shook her head.

"No, I don't think so..." She responded, her expression blank with misunderstanding. "You can't get to your floor from the garage?"

"Seems like ya do get it, then." Gajeel stated and he looked back towards the buttons. "That's right... There is no elevator that goes straight to my floor. I gotta ride two, or take the stairs or my favorite... The fire escape." He looked back towards her. "It's a pain in the ass." He added and Levy once again, could only stare at him, her brow lowering with confusion as the elevator stopped.

"I still don't understand... Why? Why would your floor be like that?" She questioned just as the elevator doors opened. Levy turned her head to look out, but didn't move, so Gajeel chose to step out before her instead. He waited there, his arm moving behind her shoulders without a word, and that made her finally step forwards, out into another small hallway.

This lobby was just as fancy as the last, if not more so, but the mood of it was very different. The first lobby had been brightly lit and full of brighter more neutral colors. This lobby was overcast and full of burgundy's, and bolder more dark colors. The lighting was also much lower, as there were no chandeliers, but very modern hanging fixtures built into the ceiling instead. The floors were covered in clean looking carpeting and the whole room felt almost more sophisticated than the last, yet somehow secluded and more private.

Levy was looking around with wonder, finally noticing something else very important about the hallway. That though it was an open space, it was rather small as there were only two other doors to go to other than the stairway and elevators, that the two of them had emerged from. Not only that, but Gajeel had started pushing them towards the nearest door. The one on the right side of the room, taking out his keys as he did so, Levy glanced up at the door, noting the number six.
She looked from the number, back to Gajeel as he began to unlock the door. Her mouth falling open with realization, as she finally came to a very real understanding of what was going on. Gajeel did not live in a simple apartment, or even that of a luxurious loft.

No…

He opened the door, standing aside to reveal shiny wooden floors and a wall lined with large windows that revealed a glamorous view of Magnolia, even from her spot behind the doorway. No… Gajeel lived in a penthouse, penthouse six of Ivory Towers to be precise.

Levy stood there in the doorway, her shoes suddenly feeling as if the soles were lined with lead, as she could not bring herself to step foot inside of that beautiful room. Almost as if she did not feel worthy. Gajeel stood in his spot beside her, his sling arm tucked to his chest as his healthy arm was still up, holding the door open for her to move, but she would not budge.

"Levy…?" He questioned, as she continued to stare inside with wide eyes, but refusing to move. He could not make out what she was looking at, as the hood was blocking most of her face from his view. He ducked his head some, finally causing her to notice him as he appeared to stay in her peripheral vision.

"Uh… Yea?" She stuttered.

"It's okay to go in. This is my place…” He explained, questioning what her problem might be. He was wondering if maybe she was rethinking everything, but he wasn't sure. The way she was acting, seemed more like she was caught off guard.

"Um yea…” She squeaked. "Okay…” She swallowed, taking a small step forwards, finally crossing the threshold of the door and making it inside. The first thing she noticed was that there was no matte for her shoes and she could not help but stare at them, realizing how wet and dirty they might be from the rain.

The thud of Gajeel stepping inside beside her, sounded off. She heard him shut the door and lock it before he turned back towards her, noticing once again that she seemed to be at a standstill. The silence hung there between them, causing Gajeel to wonder if maybe this had all been a mistake, as he had no idea what Levy was thinking.

"You alright?" He finally asked, not knowing what more to do. "Because look Levy… If yer not okay with this…” At that, Levy finally turned her head to look at him with one eye. He could just see the tip of her nose from behind her hood.

"No." She answered rather quickly. "It isn't that." She explained. She turned back forwards. She appeared to be looking at the windows, potentially catching some of the view, despite being so far back. "I just wasn't expecting… All of this…” She stated, putting emphasize on the last word and Gajeel could not help, but smirk, finally understanding. He slowly started to step around her, arriving just in front of her small body. She looked up towards him. "I am…” She began to say slowly, taking in the air. "Overwhelmed." She breathed out.

"Well don't be shrimp." He answered, smirking down at her and attempting to lighten the mood. "Cause it ain't a big deal..." Levy looked up at him, almost incredulously, her arms hanging at her sides.

"How can you say that?" She questioned him, in alarm. "You've seen where I live... This is…” She continued, her voice a bit rattled and exasperated. Gajeel could tell she seemed mildly upset.
"Hey now..." He interrupted, causing her face to just fall as she looked back up at him. "It's alright..." He reassured her. "I want you to get used to this place..." She tilted her head at him, once again looking at him with wonder as if she had no idea how that was possible. "If you're going to be spendin' time here, I want you to feel welcomed." Levy glanced away from him at that, as though she were contemplating his words. Her eyes still wandering around the room and taking in the space behind him. He could read the doubt in her expression.

"Why...? Why didn't you ever tell me, Gajeel?" She then questioned, looking back towards him with a frown over her face and he seemed completely unaware of what she was asking.

"Tell you what?" He asked in response and she looked around, gesturing just ever so slightly, her hand by her leg.

"This... That your- I don't even know how to say it..." She paused. "That you have, money." She finally managed, the last part coming out weakly as though she hadn't wanted to say it out loud. Gajeel stood more upright at her answer, his head going up as he brought his good hand up to the back of his neck and let it settle there. He rubbed it back and forth, as his sights settled above them, pondering the question.

"I guess... I just never thought to." He answered, his expression seemed earnest and unaware. "It's not really important to me." He added. "Or somethin' I think about... It's just my life." Gajeel answered, his eyes coming back down to meet Levy's face again. "I've been livin' this way ever since Jose brought me in... It's just the reality of what I do." Gajeel's hand dropped back down to his side. "Jose always had money, and he took care of me when I was a kid..." He explained, watching her steadily. "I began workin' fer him officially when I was sixteen... And as soon as I was old enough to get my own place... I ended up here... Money has never been an issue, fer as long as I've been with him." Gajeel added, his words calm. "I didn't mean for it ta come across as a secret I was keepin, or anythin like that..." He explained. "I just..." He began, but his voice was fading as though he didn't know what more to say, his sights settled above them, pondering the question.

"I understand... I just never thought to." He answered, his expression seemed earnest and unaware. "It's not really important to me." He added. "Or somethin' I think about... It's just my life." Gajeel answered, his eyes coming back down to meet Levy's face again. "I've been livin' this way ever since Jose brought me in... It's just the reality of what I do." Gajeel's hand dropped back down to his side. "Jose always had money, and he took care of me when I was a kid..." He explained, watching her steadily. "I began workin' fer him officially when I was sixteen... And as soon as I was old enough to get my own place... I ended up here... Money has never been an issue, fer as long as I've been with him." Gajeel added, his words calm. "I didn't mean for it ta come across as a secret I was keepin, or anythin like that..." He explained. "I just..." He began, but his voice was fading as though he didn't know what more to say, his sights now settled on the floor. Levy was glancing away, her head nodding gently.

"I understand..." She answered, her eyes coming back up to meet his, just as he looked back up. "I mean... At least I'm trying to..." She added. "Really... I don't know what it is like to not have to think, or worry about money, but..." She spoke quickly "I'm sorry... This is just really... Really, surprising..." She answered looking around. "I mean... I kind of had a feeling you were at least- I don't know... Comfortable...? Based on where you were living... But this..." She spoke, her eyes taking in the room once more. "This is on a whole different level than I was expecting." Her eyes came back up to meet his once more, before Gajeel was stepping towards her as she continued to speak. "I guess it is hard for someone like me to understand..." Her eyes had followed him near as she spoke and now he stood directly in front of her, with little space between them. "I've always had to struggle to get by..." She had to bring her head back some, to look up at him, as he looked down at her in return. "For as long as I can remember..." He reached towards her face, taking hold of her hood and pulling it off of her head. She held his gaze, her expression a bit vulnerable. "But you already knew that... Didn't you?" She asked him softly. "You saw where I live, after all." And Gajeel nodded.

"Yea... I've seen it..." And Levy had to look back down at that, her cheeks had turned pink, she was actually feeling embarrassed. "Not sure why yer lettin' it bother you though, Levy." He spoke, his tone more serious. "I told ya before, I like yer place." He explained and he could feel himself wanting to touch her in comfort, so he let his hand rest on her head. This time settling on her hair, it was slightly damp in places from getting caught in the downpour. "But for now, ... This is safer..."

Levy picked up her head a little at this, remembering that she had agreed with the terms of her going
to his place from now on, instead of vice versa, over the phone. Her reasons had been more for the sake of Gajeel's mobility though, rather than safety, seeing as he was injured.

"The penthouse is high up, and this building is very secure." His hand dropped away from her head. "If we are gonna be visiting each other... I just like the idea of you bein' here, rather than at your place." He explained. Levy said nothing as Gajeel turned back towards the room partially. "But... It is also very important to me, that you are comfortable." He continued, glancing towards the windows. "So, if you don't feel that way here... You just gotta let me know... I don't want to ask you to do anythin', ya don't wanna do..."

"No... It's okay Gajeel..." Levy finally answered after a few seconds of silence, gaining Gajeel's eyes back over her. She matched his stare. "Really, it's great actually... I do want to be here... With you..." Levy answered and Gajeel tried to again, fight the tiny smirk that was forming on his face, but he found that he wasn't able to. He turned his head away, the smile breaking onto his lips.

"Yea..." He stated, not knowing what more to say, his smirk growing into a full out grin. Heat was stretching into his neck and ears, and he felt almost flustered as he tried to think of what to do or say next. His insides were taking flight with excitement and he found it very difficult to stay calm. "Oh wait! I got it!" He finally exclaimed, causing Levy's eyes to widen as something had just occurred to him. "Hold on... Just wait here a minute, shrimp... Take off yer coat er somethin' and I'll be right back." He suggested.

"Uhh... All right..." Levy answered a bit put off by his sudden excitement and Gajeel smiled once again.

"Good..." He stated, before turning away. Levy smirked a bit herself, unsure of what had gotten into him. It was somewhat amusing. "Then I'll show ya around..." He was muttering as he walked away. Making his way through the room quickly, his boots thudding against the walnut floors recklessly, with little to no care for the state of how they might end up.

Levy could not help, but think about what a strange sight it was to see Gajeel of all people, sauntering around in his usual manner, but in such an upscale room. Completely at ease, like nothing mattered. She raised an eyebrow and smiled uneasily, until she watched him disappear down a hallway on the right. Clearly, he was at home, as weird as that was for her to wrap her brain around. She shook her head, on the verge of nervous laughter at the absurdity of her own situation. Taking in the space with some kind of feeling that was akin to disbelief, but also somehow, humor.

What the hell is even happening right now...?

Where she was currently standing was the entryway, which didn't appear to be very big, but only because the room was so open. To her right there was a wall only a few feet away, with a door that was clearly a coat closet. She only knew that, because it was open and she could see Gajeel's leather jacket hanging inside, with very little variation of other jackets to look at. At least one dress coat, and maybe something like a trench coat, but nothing else besides what looked like an older, more dirtier pair of boots on the floor.

From there, the wall continued down the right side, with nothing along it, but an extremely large television mounted to the wall about halfway down. There was a seating arrangement placed around the television. Sleek leather furniture; a large comfy looking couch and two matching chairs. A large glass table in front of the couch and an area rug beneath the furniture, taking up a decent amount of space on the floor. There were also two glass end tables near the chairs, that matched the large middle table. Other than that, there wasn't much else to look at on that side of the room.

Hmm... This place is very nice, but he doesn't have much in it... Levy thought as she could not help,
but notice the barren state of the entire room. It had basically no décor, and nothing much in it, to make it appear as though somebody actually lived in it. It was almost as if it had been staged to look like the cover of a magazine, rather than an actual home. Gajeel appeared to be a man who could afford a lot, but actually desired very little.

Levy continued to look on, noticing the light fixtures that hung from the ceiling. They were very modern; the mount was a wavy line of metal, that consisted of small spotlights going down it, to illuminate the seating area in a very, 'center of the room' kind of way. The walls were a neutral very light gray, that almost appeared white, but with a cool tint to them. The last part of the right wall ended, by wrapping around a corner, where there appeared to be a hallway. That was the hall Levy had seen Gajeel disappear to.

Levy's eyes then moved from the entryway of the hallway, to the farthest wall from where she stood, the one directly across from her. It appeared to lead out from the hallway Gajeel had gone down, and it was basically made up of all windows. Large windows, that were nearly the scale of the room as they took over the space, leading out to the left, where the ceiling suddenly seemed to drop off and the room opened up even more.

The ceiling must have been much higher on that side of the room, but Levy was not able to see it from where she was standing. She had only figured this out, because she could see the back side of a stairway from where she was standing. The base of which, was probably about twelve feet from her position, to the left and a little diagonal from her spot. The stairway was designed to look like floating planks, that you could see through. And Levy knew there must have been a middle landing, based on the way they were facing, as they appeared to turn back in the opposite direction.

Just behind the stairs, closer to the corner, diagonal of where Levy's spot was located, was a pool table. Most people would have likely of used this spot for a dining room table, as it appeared to be that of a dining room space, but not Gajeel. Levy continued to examine that corner, standing on her tiptoes to see if she could manage a better view. The windows on the far wall, followed through with that same corner and about halfway down the left wall. Among them was also what appeared to a glass door, actually located near and behind the pool table. Perhaps it led to a balcony, or the ever famous 'fire escape', Gajeel had mentioned numerous times. Levy's eyes moved back over towards the left, where drywall finally reappeared along the wall, it was soon followed by black covers and fancy tiles, as Levy could now see what appeared to be the start of a kitchen.

She was taking note of the details, once she heard Gajeel's footsteps quickly approaching. She turned her head just in time to see him round around the corner, walking towards her and moving between the couch and glass table. Before stopping only a few feet in front of her and tossing her a brown plush towel.

"There you go." He spoke, just as Levy caught it and looked up at him in question. "Soaked, remember?" Levy glanced down at it in her hands, feeling dumb.

"Oh right..." She answered and Gajeel watched as she brought it up to her face.

"Oh hey, take yer coat off first." Gajeel suggested and Levy again felt like an idiot as she brought the towel away from her face. She looked at him, clearly still off kilter and feeling somewhat embarrassed about that, as he stepped near.

"Of course... Forgot..." She mumbled and Gajeel brought a hand up. Levy slipped the shoulder bag off and pushed it beside the front door with her foot.

"Here..." Gajeel then offered and she graciously handed him the towel back, so that she could pull the wind breaker off and over her head. It was indeed soaked, and her clothes though not completely
wet, were most certainly damp in areas.

The sweater Levy had, had on underneath her coat was a subtle teal and black color, full of long weaving patterns on the sleeves. The neckline was round and somewhat large, though Gajeel wasn't sure, if that was just because it was meant to be, or if that was, because Levy was so small. He offered her the towel back, once she was holding her dripping coat in her hands.

"Here, I'll trade you." Gajeel spoke, "I'll throw it in the drier for you er somethin." Levy looked up at him with acknowledgement, gently taking the towel back and handing him the jacket.

"Oh, right...! You have your own washer and drier, don't you?" Levy then asked, as she put the towel over her head in an attempt to dry her damp hair. Gajeel nodded in response.

"Yea, nothing impressive though." Levy had to laugh at his modesty as she pulled the towel off of her head.

"Not to you... I would kill to have that." She answered and Gajeel just shook his head with a smile, turning away.

"Well how bout I show you how to use it sometime and you can do some laundry if you want… Yours of course. Not mine." He had to add, suddenly realizing how it had sounded and Levy could not help, but grin at him.

"Oh Gajeel..." She chimed. "Are you trying to make me into your little wife already?" She then asked in mock concern, her hand and the towel going over her heart in alarm. Gajeel brought a hand to his forehead.

"Ah don't make me regret bein nice, or else I'm gonna have to charge you quarters." He answered, refusing to turn and look at her smiling face. "Now come on... I wanna show you around." And Levy smirked knowingly.

"Okay... You got it." She answered lightly, the towel around her neck, as she held onto the ends of it with both hands.

The first area they headed towards was down the hallway, near the back of the room where Gajeel had gone to before. There on the right side, along the wall with no windows was a room. The door was open and inside was what appeared to be an office. There was a futon, a low wooden table, plush carpeting and a large corner desk with a computer. There was also a ceiling fan and a filing cabinet inside of the closet.

Gajeel was standing near the doorway, allowing Levy to look inside.

"Kind of a small room, not much to it... So, I just use it for work sometimes." Levy looked up at him with confusion.

"You work? Like on a computer...?" She then asked, turning back towards the room with a giggle.

"Haha very funny." He stated with a roll of his eyes. "Point is, if you need to use the computer or do some work, feel free to use it."

"Hmm... Alright." She answered, as Gajeel watched her look around. The amused smile was still hovering over her lips, and her hands were still clinging to the towel that hung around her neck as she took a step further inside "But you know..." She began. "It is small, but I think at one point it could have been a bedroom, because of the ceiling fan." Levy pointed out, literally pointing with her hand.
"Yea maybe... I don't know." Gajeel suddenly dismissed. "Now c'mon." He answered turning away and Levy followed after him. The next door along the same wall, was a full bathroom with a bathtub shower. The third and very last door on that wall, was the foretold laundry room Gajeel had mentioned. The two of them threw Levy's wet coat and the towel in a basket and then moved on with the tour. The the very end of the hallway only consisted of a small section of wall, where there was a large linen closet full of some towels and blankets.

"That about does it for down here, now this way..." Gajeel stated, turning back around and heading back out of the hallway, to the living room with Levy in hot pursuit just behind him. They headed towards the other side of the room, in the direction of the stairs and pool table. Levy, could not help, but gaze out the windows, not being able to recall the last time she had seen such a nice view of Magnolia. Once the two of them had arrived in the opposite corner Gajeel paused, his arm going out towards the kitchen.

"Kitchen." He stated like a caveman. He then pointed to the pool table, following up with, "Pool table." He then pointed to the stairs. "Stairs." He then added, continuing with the ridiculous charade of labeling obvious amenities to his home.

Ignoring him, Levy glanced up and saw the landing of the stairs, as well as the balcony overhead. Her eyes continued up from there, taking note of the large and elaborate light fixture that hung from the high ceiling. It was some kind of crazy cube design, that she could not wrap her brain around or understand, but it certainly looked cool. Wow... She was thinking just as Gajeel had started to speak once more.

"Feel free to eat whatever you want or whatever you can find. There probably isn't a whole lot though... Haven't gone anywhere in a while... Well because... You know why..." His words drifted off, before continuing. "And the fridge is big, so put whatever you want or need in it." He spoke as Levy finally pulled her eyes away from the light, or art, or whatever it was, to look at him. "Ya know... If you want to... I don't usually got a whole lot in there, anyways. Not home enough to cook much... And it's always just been me so..." He added

"Gajeel." Levy finally addressed him and he paused, waiting for her to continue. His expression made him appear a bit on edge, as if in suspense and he was, only because of the way she had said his name. "How come you don't have a table to sit and eat at? You know like a big one, right here?" Levy finally asked, her hands hovering over the pool table and making a square, as she tried to visually explain what she meant. Curiosity getting the better of her, as she now knew for certain, that he could most definitely afford such a thing and that there was plenty of room for one in his home. "Like... Where do people do that at?" She then asked and Gajeel just shrugged with his good shoulder, unsure of why she was asking.

"The couch." He answered simply. "What would I need that for?" He then asked and now it was Levy's turn to shrug.

"I don't know... Guests?" She then offered, but Gajeel only shook his head.

"It's only ever just me here." He answered. "People have never really come over before. Maybe Juvia once and a while, for work purposes mostly, but other than that... I've maybe only ever had one other visitor and that's bout it... Now there's you... So... Hmm..." He suddenly pondered, his hand going up to his chin. "Maybe I should get one now...huh? But then..." He glanced down at the pool table in front of them. "Where would the pool table go?" He then questioned and Levy could only stare at him with her eyebrows lowered and a frown over her face in frustration.

Her expression eased though, once she realized what he had said. *He's never had more than two different people over at his home before?* That sounded so foreign to her and lonely... She could
hardly believe it. She had always had friends come over to visit her, she couldn't ever imagine not having that, especially now that her family was gone. The loneliness would be too crushing. She turned to look at him, the question taking form.

"Are you serious about that?"

"This just seems like the best spot for it." Gajeel answered and Levy shook her head.

"Not about the pool table!" She exclaimed, "About what you said before that! That you've only ever had Juvia come over here, and maybe one other person, but that's it? How?" Gajeel glanced up at her, holding her questioning gaze with curiosity, unsure of why that was such a strange thing to hear.

"Why would I? I don't really have any family or anything like that... Just Juvia." Gajeel answered

"What about friends?" Levy then asked.

"Eh... No, not really. There's Juvia and I have one other friend, but he doesn't live close and I don't like to keep him close either... For basically the same reasons, I didn't want you close... So..."

"And you are just... Okay with that?" Levy then asked completely flabbergasted.

"Well yea, of course... I have to be." He answered. "It's always been this way for me... My life needs to be private, because of what I do... And are people really so great, anyways?" Gajeel answered, but Levy could only watch him sadly, as he glanced down at the pool table. His hand knocking the solid red ball with his knuckles, so it rolled a few centimeters. "I mean think about it... People suck... They have this way of always disappointing you or just always bein' out for themselves."

Levy paused, remembering she had heard Gajeel say such things similar to this before. He had always told her, that she cared about people far more than they deserved... And that she was also far too trusting of them. He may have been right about that, to a point... But in general, Levy preferred to believe in the best of people... And besides... Life would be too lonely otherwise. She thought, watching him quietly, finally choosing to speak after thinking this through.

"People can be bad..." She chimed in, gaining his eye. "Or good... But either way..." She matched stares with him. "That just sounds so lonely Gajeel..." She explained, her tone somber. "I mean... What about Jose? You mentioned that he took you in, when you were a kid... Doesn't he come out to visit you sometimes? It almost sounds like he could be a father figure to you or something..." Levy then asked and Gajeel could only stare at her like she had lost her mind, but then he laughed instead.

"Gi hi... No. No shrimp..." He answered, causing Levy to only stare up at him in misunderstanding. "Listen..." He suddenly stated, his voice growing more serious. "Jose did take over raising me... But... He..." Gajeel almost stuttered. "I don't trust him like that..." He finally managed. "If he did ever come here... Well then, let's just say, I wouldn't have had you come here." Gajeel explained. "He's never been to my place and I am just fine with that. He's helped me out in life, but are bond isn't really 'that way'. " He explained and Levy glanced down. "It's more..." Gajeel paused, trying to think of how to explain it better. "You help me, I help you." He finally answered. "Jose has definitely been my mentor and when I was younger, maybe there was a point, where I thought I could almost see him as a replacement for my dad, but... I think I was just grateful, he allowed me a way out... Gave me somewhere to go, even after..." Then Gajeel suddenly paused.

Levy waited in suspense for him to continue, staring at him like he was a movie at the point of its climax, but Gajeel said nothing for a long moment instead. Then he seemed to almost change tact altogether, as he suddenly cleared his throat, his tone changing.
"I joined his business to repay him for givin' me somewhere to live… And also cause, it seemed like the only way to go, for a rat like me…” He finally explained. "But… Do I consider Jose a 'father figure'? No, definitely not." He finished at last.

"Oh… I see..." Levy answered unsure of what more to say after all of that. She had to remind herself, very hard, of the promise she had made in that instant. The promise to not ask Gajeel, about his clearly questionable past. Upon seeing his strange reaction, she could already see why that was likely the best choice for her to make, despite how much it was driving her mad inside. The more he told her about himself, the more she found herself wanting to ask him questions about everything. But I won't… She thought adamantly. If he wants to tell me one day… Then he will… She thought stubbornly, biting down on her bottom lip with the thought. Just as he has told me some of it now…

"Well Gajeel… I'm sorry..." Levy finally responded, not knowing what more she could offer him, without asking him any questions.

"No need for sorry's shrimp... Why would you know that?" He answered with a smirk. "Now come on, let me show you the upstairs." He stated, his body moving towards the steps and Levy followed behind him, still at a loss as she continued to digest everything he had just told her.

"I just feel bad for you... Is all. " She then added, as they reached the stairs. "I mean nobody? Not even any of your 'ladies of the evening' have been here?!” She then asked, standing just behind him and Gajeel had to pause at the phrasing just to turn around and look at her with bewilderment.

"Did you just say, 'ladies of the evening'?” He then asked in perplexity.

"Well... Yea... So?” Levy suddenly questioned. Her head coming up in confusion, as she locked eyes with him, her stare was questioning and blank. She was soon made to be angry as Gajeel began to cackle at her.

"You know that means hooker, right?!” He exclaimed, between laughs. "What do you think? I'm payin' them er-"

"Oh, shut up! I didn't literally mean prostitutes! You know what I meant!” Levy snapped, becoming enraged and embarrassed.

"I know, I know..." He said wiping at a tear, "But sometimes you are just so cute and innocent. I swear." He explained and Levy glanced away, her cheeks becoming visibly red as she folded her arms, and Gajeel laughed again. "No shrimp... Sorry. I don't invite people over here at all, especially not random women..." His laughter having calmed enough for him to speak as he grinned at her widely, revealing his fangs. "You are the one and only.” He stated, turning back around towards the steps. His words having left Levy speechless as her arms unfolded, and her mouth fell agape. She could feel her heart leap up and into her chest, unsure of what to say, until another thought just occurred to her.

"Wait… Then who do you play pool with? Don't tell me you play it by yourself…” She suddenly asked, her burning cheeks starting to cool.

"Well yea… I got that originally, thinkin' my one buddy might be over a lot more… Back when I got the place, he was around more often, until he had to go away… But eh… He's got his own things goin’ on and I'm always busy… Now, I just use it to practice, so I can win bets… Impress ladies… Normal bar things, you know…” He answered smoothly, turning back slightly to grin at her. His fangs were still on display, as he stepped up the first stair, staring down at her. Levy made sure to roll her eyes, so that he could see it, before Gajeel turned back around very carefully still smiling.
"Of course… I should have known…” She mumbled, following behind him

"Okay now… Just so ya know..." Gajeel began, going for his second stare, very slowly. "Kinda been sleeping down here, on the couch and stuff… Avoiding the steps as much as possible, cause of my leg... So, its gonna be kinda slow fer me goin' up."

"Don't worry about that..." Levy answered. "Just take your time. It's more important to me, that you don't get hurt again. And I'm here to help you, if you need me." She answered.

"It'll be okay..." Gajeel responded. "I've had to do it, to change and stuff." He answered. "It just sucks."

"Yea I understand." Levy responded as she watched him take his next wobbly step up.

It took a few minutes, but after a short while Gajeel had made it all of the way up, with Levy right beside him. Once they had made it to the top of the balcony, Levy could see that there was a small narrow hallway, cutting the wall before them down the middle. Along that hallway was one door on the left, and then there were three doors on the left; all four of them were closed.

"Okay..." Gajeel sighed. "I'm gonna head in there..." Gajeel motioned towards the only door on the left. "That's my room... Or master bedroom, or whatever you wanna call it... Just so you know…” He hesitated and Levy noticed the slightest hints of a cringe on his face. "I think I'm just going ta go in there to sit down and rest for a bit, if that's alright with you..." He seemed a bit strained as he said this.

"Oh... Are you okay?" Levy asked, becoming worried.

"Yea fine… It's just… My leg is hurting from the stairs… And I want to sit er somethin’... But you... Feel free to wonder around and get familiar with the rooms up here…”

"Oh all right..." Levy answered, unsure of what more to say. It was a bit odd to be left to her own devices, but she could tell just by looking at him, that he was indeed in pain at the moment, so she would not press the matter.

"There's at least two other bedrooms to check out before mine…" He explained. "I was kinda thinkin' you should just pick one for yourself… If you want... Whichever one you feel like."

"Pick a room?" Levy then repeated, her confusion evident, but Gajeel seemed bent on his rest now, as he had already started to move away.

"Yea..." He answered glancing back at her. "Just in case, ya ever need to stay… You don't have to do that, if ya don't want too obviously, but… If for whatever reason, that's easier… Then I'd rather you just do it… I don't you to bother with askin' me, or get hung up on the details, or anything like that..." He explained, his voice still heavy due to being tired. "I just want to be clear." He then finished seriously, so Levy knew that there wasn't any hidden meaning behind what he was suggesting.

"I see..." Levy answered, nodding and contemplating his words as she glanced down at the plush white carpeting beneath her shoes. She paused for a moment, her mind running a bit rampant with thoughts and the pressures of his request, as Gajeel began to hobble away from her further. Levy's head came back up, finally taking notice of his horrible movements as he headed towards the door.

"Okay… See ya in a few… Probably just going to head back down after you look around..." He
stated, reaching for his bedroom door.

"Okay..." Levy answered, watching him open the door and step inside, a frown over her face. He closed it behind him, leaving Levy alone, to do whatever she wanted. She glanced around, her eyes were darting down the hallway. Her body was at a complete standstill, and she had no idea where to head first.

Okay... Can't say I was expecting that... Or... Any of this, really. Came Levy's thoughts, followed by a long drawn out breathe. Okay... Here we go...

Banaboster stood there, positioned only a mere two feet away from the end of a hospital bed, his meaty hands shoved into the pockets of a black winter coat. He was adorned in his token yellow pinstriped suit underneath. His eyes were settled on the poor husk of a man who lay in the bed before him.

"Thibault..." Banaboster spoke the poor soul's name in a breath, his head nodding in confirmation as he took in what was left of his old friend and long-time employee. Two dark swollen eyes that were opened into mere slits; glazed over and staring off into nothing. A head wrapped in bandages; stitches surrounding what was nothing, but a mere lump of a nose now. Wires along his battered teeth and around his gums, to keep his crooked jaw in place, but also keeping his lips from being able to close all of the way down. He had a tube in his nose, and a brace around his neck, among other such bandages and casts, in various other places all over his body. The damage was clearly visible and extensive upon first glance. Banaboster cleared his throat before continuing, his eyes moving down to his own shuffling feet, as the sight was a bit much for anyone to stare at for an extended period of time.

"So... This is it, huh?" He then asked, glancing back up at the broken man, who made no movement or acknowledgement of his words. "This is your life now?" Banaboster then asked, watching him as if waiting for a reply, but knowing one would never come.

"Well..." He finally continued his head bowing. "I'm sorry..." He added before pausing, contemplating his next few words with care. "I'm sorry, I never found out who did this to ya..." He finally spoke again, still refusing to look back up, his head nodding some more. "I know it had to be someone workin for that bastard Jose... Maybe that dumb bear who tried ta kill me... The one who is always followin' him around, but..." He stated, his head going up a little, only to land on the foot of the bed. "I can't prove anythin', and..." His head went all of the way up now. "I'm reachin' the end of my own road here..." He explained darkly, a brief pause.

"I gotta be on my way Thibault... Leavin' everything behind... I got get the hell outta this town as soon as I can... Before I end up where you are... Or worse... If there is a worse..." He paused one last time, staring intently at the blank pale face of a man, who was by most standards, dead. "And I just came ta tell you that... That... I'm sorry this happened to ya... And also... Goodbye." He finished solemnly. Pausing for only a few more seconds, before taking a shaky breath and turning his head away. "Okay..." He was muttering to himself, in an exhale. His body beginning to turn when he was met with an enormous dark obstacle obscuring his line of sight, blocking his only path out of the small hospital room.

Banaboster froze, his eyes widening and his breath catching, as he stared at the large figure consuming the whole doorway. Memories from that snowy night outside the casino were suddenly returning to him in small glimpses all at once. It was Aria who stood before him; the arbiter to hell once again and much like that night, the large monster of a man, said and did nothing. He just stood there, as though he were a fixture in the background one would never even notice or think to look twice at. Banaboster glanced away quickly, swallowing and releasing another rapid breath. He then
took his hands out from his pockets, only to slap them uselessly at his sides in defeat.

"All right!" He chimed, his pale face snapping back up to look at Aria. "You found me!" He added in helplessness, his face looking panicked, yet somehow angry. "I'm not going anywhere!" He then snapped, his frustration shining, as he knew he would not be getting away this time. Aria did not speak, instead all he did was step aside, so that Banaboster could leave the room. Banaboster stood there, his arms practically hanging in defeat, before sighing and heading out of the room, only to stand in front of Aria. His head going up in question.

"Where we goin?" He then asked, his tone still quick and full of frustration, as he brought his hands up with the question. Aria's only response, was to point in a direction down the hall, which only led Banaboster to stare up at him in disbelief. Finally, after a moment, he sighed once more and turned on his heel to walk in the direction Aria had pointed.

After a short time of walking and taking an elevator, the two of them arrived outside the North entrance of Magnolia Medical, where a limo had been waiting for them in the rain. Aria was quick to usher Banaboster into the backseat, before following inside. Once Banaboster was seated, he soon realized that they were not the only ones in the car. Seated across from them, was a person whom Banaboster had only met on other occasion. It was Jose's other lead business associate, Sol.

"Bonsoir Monsieur Goodrich! I hope you are vell! You have been a very hard man for us to find on dis fare night! " Sol exclaimed rather gleefully, giving Banaboster little to no time, to relax, before he began speaking. He then continued with his one eye closing. "Ah, but surely you already know dis, no?" Sol then asked, a large smile across his face, as his torso bent forwards a little in jest. Banaboster stared at the lanky man, who's legs were crossed and arms were out in a strange fashion, before realizing that they were waiting for him to speak. Sweat was already lining his brow, once he finally responded.

"I've been very busy…" Banaboster coughed, clearing his throat nervously. "I had a lot of meetings… A lot of business I needed to take care of today." He answered, trying to remain calm, though he knew his voice sounded as though he were on the defense, and he was.

"Ah Oui, it is of no matter now!" Sol answered, his head snapping away and his body going back against the seat. "Aria is on the job! There can be no failure! You are here and we are off! Jose awaits!" Sol exclaimed rather excitedly and almost as if the driver had heard the words, the car began to move.

"Of course…" Banaboster replied, a hand reaching for the collar of his dress shirt as he began to pull at it. His face was turning red, as the sweat began to build around his neck. He felt like there wasn't enough air to breathe in the abnormally hot car, as he began to wave the fabric of his collar back and forth in an effort to fan his face. "A meeting right…?" He then asked, glancing away from Sol. "That was what he wanted…"

"Oui, that is correct Monsieur!" Sol answered, his hands settling over the knee of his bent leg.

"I see…" Banaboster responded. "So… Where we havin' it?" He then asked, glancing back up.

"Ah oui, a marvelous location indeed! None other than Jose's very own private seas food tavern 'The Shark Tank'!" Sol answered, his smile growing. "Prepare yourself Mosieur Goodrich you are in for a… How do you say… Treat?"

"Oh…" Banaboster then answered completely unaware of what that meant. "Can't wait… But… What about the press conference… Wasn't that tonight…? Kinda figured Jose had to be there for that…"
"Ah oui, the conference is tonight… But Jose insisted that this is to come first…” Sol explained, his stare locking onto Banaboster's face. "You are to have his full attention and presence instead… Tis an honor for you, on such an important night, no?" Sol questioned, his voice slowing and growing more serious by the moment. Banaboster could only look on, his complexion going from red to pale.

"Yes…” Was all he could manage in return, his throat drying. "It is…” He then muttered.

The memory of waking up with his arms wrapped in chains and hanging from somewhere above his head, was not something Gajeel had chosen to remember, but was made too. Visualizing a dark room, glowing in a blue green haze that matched the very sea every time he so much as closed his eyes, was not what he had been striving for in life, but now older and wiser, he also knew better…

Gajeel understood that sometimes, the curse of being alive also meant being stuck and forced to carry on certain pains in your life, forever…

Imagine being shackled to one miserable moment for the rest of your foreseeable future… Well that… That just does something to a person, no matter how much they would like it not to…

For Gajeel, it was this; the duration he spent in Jose's back room at the Shark Tank. An ambiguous period in his life really; where days and hours swirled together as one span of time that amounted to nothing for him. And yet still, he could not escape those hours, even to this day. Instead he carried on knowing, but not reliving; with only the threat that he may be forced to wake up there, at any moment. Should he allow himself the weakness to do so, and today for whatever reason, was that day.

He was diving back down into the rabbit-hole, despite his better judgement. His heart free and naked. More vulnerable than he had let it be in such a long time. His body all encompassed with the emotion of it. Pale, shaky and hard to breathe; reduced to someone so helpless and weak that he might just break, before completely losing his mind altogether.

He had been a child, so young, too young for such a terrible fate. His eyelids heavy, but he had opened them, despite the strain of exhaustion that had consumed him from being there for so long. His body had been stuck in that position; upright, his own weight the very source of his stress. Hanging by the arms, wrapped and rewrapped all of the way down to his elbows in heavy skin digging metal. The tips of his toes, just barely touching the ground. All moving having ceased, after the initial bout of thrashing for several hours, due to the shock of waking up terrified, and captive to such a strange and creepy place.

Something caught his eye, a large shadow shifting across his face, a creature gliding in the corner of his vision. Gajeel tried to bring his head up, but the strain on his neck and shoulders, made it very difficult. The pain of hot and tired muscles, attacking him upon even the slightest of movements. Still somehow, he managed to catch sight of it as it moved more towards the center of its allowed space.

It had been a shark, only blocking out some of the aquarium's light. A large predator with charcoal gray color and speckles littering it's back, and white across its underbelly. Gajeel was instantly mesmerized by it, as it moved the span of the aquarium wall before him.

"Ah oui! It seems we have awakened!" A voice had exclaimed, startling Gajeel and breaking him from his trance. An odd figure had approached him from the shadows. He hadn't even heard the door to the right open. He hadn't even been aware of it until that moment.

"Ah I see you have settled in, quite a bit no? All your fight absolved...Ah oui, that means now, you can tell us..." The noodle-like man spoke, his body rocking back and forth with each step he made.
towards Gajeel like a writhing snake. "Tell us... A propos de ton pere! Your father! Where is he?!"
Sol had then asked him, his voice lowering as his oval shaped face was drawing near, only mere
inches away from Gajeel's nose. His lips upturned into a smile that was much too wide for his
narrow face. His eyes held a ferocious glint, as he stared down at the boy with mischievous intent.

And so, it began. Sol's endless interrogation of Gajeel as a young boy who knew absolutely nothing
about his father's whereabouts. Yes, no matter how many times he told this strange person, that he
did not know where his father was, the peculiar man refused to believe Gajeel, and as a result, there
was pain. Slaps, whacks with objects Sol was holding. Often a cane, he just seemed to have
hovering nearby. It hurt enough, even though Sol was using quite a lot of restraint, only because
Gajeel was so young. That did not matter though, the profound effects of abuse and torture were
already inescapable, as Gajeel could do nothing to defend himself from these assaults. Instead he was
forced to endure them, his body still uselessly hanging from the chains that were wrapped around a
pully device, used to carry meat or buckets of chum up and over to where the sharks were to be fed.
He would often cry and beg for relief, followed by questions of 'why'. Reciting the only truth, he
knew for certain, that he knew absolutely nothing. This happened so often, to the point that even Sol
must have gotten frustrated with Gajeel, as eventually it was Jose who showed his face.

Gajeel could remember the relief of seeing another person who was not Sol. Jose never did strike
him, but Gajeel soon realized that this new man, was the one who was giving Sol the orders to do, as
he had been. The first time they met, Jose had made it a point to stare at Gajeel directly in the eye.
Almost as if he had been sizing the young boy up and seeking out truth, behind Gajeel's haggard
expression.

"Sol..." He then addressed the peculiar man, who had been torturing Gajeel behind him.

"Oui, monsieur?" Sol exclaimed in eagerness. Jose did not move, his head still directly in front of
Gajeel's face, as the boy's chest heaved and his eye kept a steady lock on the older man who now
stood before him.

"I believe a change in tact, is in order!" Jose then called, without removing his gaze from Gajeel.

"Oh Oui! YES!" Sol then exclaimed in excitement, as Jose's eyebrows lowered, but his stare stayed
locked onto Gajeel's face.

"You are tired of this... Are you not, boy...?" Jose then asked quietly, though it sounded more as if
he was telling Gajeel the facts. Gajeel said nothing, he could only stare on, as Jose continued. "Your
father abandoned you... You have no reason to protect him..." Jose then added, his expression grim
and his stare stead-fold.

The cold chill of a sentence like that, never leaves you... And unfortunately for Gajeel, he could
remember that moment with vivid clarity, no matter how much he would like not to. From there,
sound and peace did not exist. There was only a maddening buzzing in his ears, as Sol continued to
repeat much of the same to him on a regular basis. Movement had become like watching a painting
come to life, but there was no beauty in it. Just fantasy completely destroyed, by the cold touch of
reality.

It didn't take much from there, for Gajeel to decide he was done. Done being held captive by pain or
anything else. He felt his every heartbeat and his every breath beat through his chest, as he closed his
eyes one night. Bent on escaping the hellhole, they had locked him up in.

He had watched the sharks, he watched them move. Beast of the deep, strong and incredible, yet
still... He watched as the very first he had ever laid eyes on approached the glass. It came to a stop,
and then it stared at him with its beady black eyes... Still trapped... He knew then, the only way he
would ever be able to escape, was by becoming an even stronger beast, able to adapt and learn. Gajeel brought his head up, his mind having pushed himself to ignore everything. Ignore pains and aches, he didn't care anymore... All he needed was for his body to stay together long enough, for him to do, what needed to be done.

*Mind over body...* He concentrated, as he wiggled and waved his arm, but not without thought. No longer was he recklessly thrashing around in his movements, this was methodical. He had been thinking, as his head stared up to the left, his eyes on the chains that surrounded the mechanism above him. The one that held his left arm prisoner.

It took hours, but finally some success was achieved, though not exactly with the best result. As Gajeel could see the last of the chain still hanging on, he swung his arm up. Freeing it from the bar above his head at long last, but that left the heavy metal to come falling down towards him. Gajeel braced himself, for the brute force of the falling chain, his eyelids slamming shut, but it did not hit him. Instead, it just dropped his left shoulder with violent velocity. Leaving him hanging, only by the right arm, whereas the left was being dragged down by the chains that were now near his feet.

Gajeel let out a scream of pain from the jerk, his body now being pulled apart by two different chains, as he still hung there. The reason he had started with the left, was because the chain wrapped around his right arm, had felt much tighter. And now that he was hanging there, as he was. One arm being pulled up and the other being pulled down, he knew for certain he had been correct.

The chains around his right arm were fastened, and digging in deep to his flesh. Leaving his strength divided, so that he could never even hope to move in such a way, as to bring them down from where they had been hanging. Instead, he had only one choice, he would need to slip out of them if he was to escape.

Grueling hours of pain and blood, slipping down his shoulder from the chains that refused to let him go. Despite how horrible it all felt as Gajeel thrashed around trying to free himself, flesh be damned, it was working. He was coming free, sliding down, not all his skin was coming with him though. He was gritting his teeth, his mind screaming as he pictured his father's smirking face.

*Mind over body! I am still alive to feel it and I don't care anymore!* Then finally, a tear. Gajeel's flesh giving way, and freeing his body completely. The fall from such a small height, feeling way longer as it held the air of freedom, like a sky diver excited for the leap.

He hit the concrete, landing on the chains that had coiled underneath him and were still around his left arm. Gajeel pushed himself up, despite the severity of the bleeding injuries that surrounded his right arm. He should have been in shock, the pain was overwhelming, but he was running on adrenaline and fear. He was on his feet in mere seconds, unraveling the chains from his left arm.

A shadow was moving over his face, terror jumping into his throat, as he suddenly snapped his head up. Thankfully it had only been the shark once again. He sat there staring at it for half a second. Regret lingering inside of him, for leaving the trapped creature behind.

"Sorry…” He finally whispered out loud, towards the beautiful beast of the deep, as it gracefully swam by, before turning towards the door, to make his escape.

Gajeel sat there, his back against the headboard of his bed, one leg stretched across the mattress, the other hanging off and onto the floor. He had a pillow wedged under his sling for support. His eyes were half-lidded and glazed over as he stared out, across the span of his bedroom, almost as if in a trance. The memory having been played out, so fresh and real that it was easy to get lost in, but his
thoughts were soon broken, as the door opened. Gajeel straightened up, his brain forced away from the terrible memory and there stood Levy, finally in his bedroom for the first time.

"I'm sorry… I didn't scare you, did I? Were you sleeping?" She questioned, noticing he looked pale and a little too serious.

"No," Gajeel answered firmly, realizing he needed to get his mind out of the past. "Trust me I wasn't..." His words drifted, as Levy stood there, her head moving around and taking in the room with obvious amazement.

Gajeel's bedroom was a long rectangle, with a large-scale window to the left of his bed. His bed was a modern-day looking king, because why not, he could afford it? The carpeting was dark and the walls were a light gray, like downstairs. He had a large walk in closet and a door to a private bathroom, along the right wall. His dresser was to the left of the door Levy had walked in through, though it seemed rather empty like most of Gajeel's house, she was still amazed by the sheer size of it. Nobody needed a bedroom this big.

"Wow... This room is crazy..." She commented. Gajeel was watching her as she looked around, his eyes being drawn down as he finally noticed that she was holding something.

"Levy..." He finally addressed her and her head turned, her eyes landing back over him, as he had yet to move from his spot. He said nothing for a moment, he just stared at her, his eyes shifting down to the object she was holding with obvious acknowledgment and right away she seemed to understand.

"Yea!" She exclaimed, holding up what appeared to be the strangest guitar known to man. It was large, purple, and the shape of it was jagged and crooked, as though someone had been trying to create a star and had failed miserably. "What the heck is, this!?" She suddenly snapped.

"What does it look like?" Gajeel then asked. "An instrument." He answered bluntly.

"Is that what it looks like to you?!" She then asked, as she glanced over at the guitar she was holding by the neck.

"Well yea it should... I made it after all." He answered and at that, Levy's eyes grew tenfold.

"You've got to be kidding me right...?" She then asked, but Gajeel could only stare back at her, completely clueless as to why that sounded so crazy. "You are serious?" Levy then asked, looking to the guitar then back to him.

"Yea! Why would I lie?!" Gajeel suddenly snapped back, his voice growing with his confusion.

"Why do you have it?" Levy then asked.

"Because I play! Why else?" Gajeel responded and he could only stare back at her, as a huge grin spread across her lips.

"You do not!" She exclaimed, damn near the point of laughter and Gajeel watched her completely serious.

"Hell yea I do, shrimp! And I sing too!" He told her and this finally did Levy in, she was laughing so hard that her small body practically hugged the large guitar.

"Oh my god Gajeel..." She spoke while laughing. "I can't ... I can't even picture it..."
"Why's it so funny? I've been doin' it since I was a kid..." He then asked as Levy's laughter had slowed and stopped. She was still smiling, an amused glimmer in her eyes.

"Have you ever performed?!" She then asked, suddenly becoming excited and Gajeel brought a hand up to the back of his head, showing his embarrassment.

"Well no, not officially... Maybe for my dad when I was super young and bad at it... And maybe on the streets with my childhood buddy... But that's it... I'm all self-taught..." His words drifted, as Levy suddenly jumped towards the bed, pushing the guitar towards him.

"Sing me a song!" She suddenly chimed almost interrupting him. "I want to see you play!" She exclaimed, her cheeks red from laughing and her eyes ablaze with excitement. She was now on his bed, leaning against it, right near where he had been sitting, the guitar down on the mattress and her lap. Gajeel's hand dropped.

"I can't." He answered and Levy's smile faltered.

"Why not!? You nervous?" She suddenly asked and Gajeel smirked.

"No way shrimp... My shoulder, remember! I can't play like this..." He answered, gesturing towards his sling. And with his words, came an instant frown over Levy's face. She shifted her head away and glanced down in sorrow.

"Oh right..." She responded gently. "I'm sorry Gajeel, I wasn't thinking..." Her words drifted as she stared up and off. Gajeel watched her, his smirk growing into a smile, he could feel his heart pumping fast, as he reached out with his good hand and brought it down over the top of her head. Levy glanced up at him and he held her gaze with his fang revealing grin.

"No worries shrimp... The very minute I'm better... I promise I will play you that song." He answered and he watched her lips upturn, his chest tightening at the way it made him feel.

"I can't wait to hear it..." She answered.

Juvia was standing amongst a crowd at city hall, they were inside the meeting auditorium, near the stage. Currently she was scrambling with her hand inside of the purse over her shoulder, in hot pursuit of her phone. She had just arrived only minutes prior, flabbergasted and worried she would miss everything, or that something would go wrong and she wouldn't be there to fix it. Not that she would be able to do anything if that did happen anyways... The press conference was to begin at any moment, as last call for going live, had already happened about several minutes ago. And unless the captain, Erza Scarlet was there to speak, then all of it had been for nothing anyways.

"Juvia!" Came a man's voice, and Juvia's head snapped up, her hand still in her purse. Gray was coming towards her at a fast pace, weaving through the crowd until he arrived in her clearing. Juvia had finally managed to pull out her phone and resettle the bag back on her shoulder as she glanced up at Gray, who now stood very close and was slightly taller.

"Gray!" She greeted, though her expression showed nothing, but mild panic and worry as she adjusted the bag on her shoulder. "Is the captain here?" She immediately asked as Gray's head shifted around, his eyes scanning the room. His hand had landed onto her forearm, almost as if to steady her, as she had still been struggling with the weight of her bag, her nerves clearly doing a number on her.

"I don't know." He stated truthfully and he could see the fear grow on her face, as his eyes settled over her. He also had a frown over his lips and his eyes remained serious. "I trust her though." He
answered. "She said she would be here... So, she will." He explained, trying to reassure Juvia, but for some reason he wasn't entirely convinced himself. Juvia's nerves having seemingly affected his own, almost as if he shared her desperation.

"I hope so..." She answered weakly, her head looking away, her own eyes scanning the room. She looked so pale, her eyes shining as she glanced around.

She was dressed up, wearing a form fitting dress, with a skirt that hugged her legs and ended just above her knees. There were no straps or shoulders to the dress, as it hugged her chest and torso in order to stay up. Her hat was gone and her hair was pulled back into a ponytail with a claw clip, that squeezed is shut and then let the rest of it fall back into waves, over her shoulder-blades.

Gray was staring at her for a moment. His eyes somehow finding their way down further, than he had meant to let them, as he got a forgiving look at the cleavage that hung out from her dress. Once he realized what he had done, he quickly snapped his head up, Juvia hadn't noticed at all. She hadn't even been looking at him.

"You look... Nice." He finally spoke, though it had come out awkwardly as Gray's cheeks reddened at his own thoughts. Juvia turned back to look at him, her mouth unable to move for a moment, when something caught her eye. She turned back, and there by the door, where people were flooding in, was Aria. Her lips parted in surprise, as she looked to Gray.

"Gray I have to go... Aria is here." She explained, but he let a hand rest on her shoulder just as she turned away.

"Hold on." He stated, his hand settling over her exposed white skin. His composure had returned, despite how soft she felt. "You don't have to go alone." Her eyes were back on him as she turned her head back. She still looked very worried, her eyes large and timid, still shining.

"Yes I do." She answered. "I'm sorry..." She finished definitively, though she sounded lost as she turned away from Gray and moved quickly through the crowd. Gray watched her, his brow lowering, as his eye stayed on Aria. He somehow knew she had done that, because she had been afraid for him.

"Aria!..." Juvia called arriving in front of the large man who had stocked up position in the back of the room, as more people poured in through the doors.

"Juvia..." He greeted.

"Where is Jose!?!" She then asked in outrage and Aria paused.

"It is sad... So sad... Banaboster...!" He began to blubber and Juvia had to take a step back.

"Banaboster...?" She then asked, as it occurred to her what he meant, more so questioning him out of shock, rather than a question.

"Attention! Attention!" Came a loud voice from the podium. "Please quiet down we are about to go live!" Everyone's eyes were pulled to the stage and up came Erza Scarlet, from the stairs on the left. Dressed in formal business attire, a women's suit, but with her hair down, so that the color could shimmer brightly underneath the lights.

Juvia could feel the relief move off of her in waves, as she let out a breath she hadn't been aware of keeping. The exhale almost having made her dizzy, as she rested a hand over her chest, but she managed to stay on her feet. She then swiveled her head in the direction of Gray, whose body was turned towards the stage, but his head was looking back, right at her through the crowd. He was
smiling and she could not help, but smile gratefully back in return. Aria who was still beside her, seemed to keep his head forwards, listening carefully.

Only seconds went by, before the signal that the cameras were rolling sounded off. All attention was now placed on the scarlet haired woman on stage, as she stood before a podium, back dropped with in a thick navy curtain.

"Hello and good evening." Erza finally greeted, her eyes looking out and shifting over the crowd. Her head was leaning in towards the microphone on the podium, to make sure she could be heard. She then shifted her eyes back down, before continuing. "Tonight, I am fortunate enough..." She glanced back up, "To speak on behalf of the entire Magnolia police force, as we issue out are condolences for the dangerous, and near life threatening event, that took place only days ago in are fare city." Erza then glanced around at the crowd, her stare fierce. "Many of you, know me... Or know, of me... I strive every day to keep Magnolia safe, and clean, from corruption no matter the source, of power." She paused, glancing down, before looking back up. "My officers are no different. They know the law and they act appropriately within the law, no matter what the risks may be, when doing so." Erza glanced down. "Now many of you know why I am here today... I have been requested-No, bullied into making a very public and formal apology to a certain organization who claims that the actions led by myself and a small team of security on Monday night, were wrong and unjust." She glanced up slowly. "But they were not."

The crowd began to stir upon hearing this statement; people speaking amongst themselves, followed by flashes of photography. Juvia could feel her face falling and paling with fear. Her heart was sinking so far down, that she felt like the blood was pooling at her feet. Gray was running a hand through his hair.

Erza what the hell are you doing?!

His mind was questioning as he bit down in frustration.

"Those who claim to know the law, but have no responsibility in upholding it... Those who claim to know the facts, when they refuse to share it... These are not the people to turn to, for information during such events." Erza explained. "As an officer and a captain who knows the rights of people, and the just ways of the law, I know that what I did, was not wrong, but I will apologize..."

Juvia glanced up, her head turning in the direction of Gray, he also glanced towards her. He seemed to understand what she was asking him and he just shook his head with a frown, as an answer. He had no idea what Erza was going to say or do next. Both Gray and Juvia turned their heads forwards to watch on.

"I will apologize for the disruption. For the confusion. For the danger and the fear. I will apologize for anytime you as a citizen of our city, do not feel safe... For my failures do not lie within my actions, but instead where I do not act. Or better yet, where I can't. I cannot always protect you... As the law states, I only have so much power to use, which in itself, is fare... The rights of the people shall not be breached, but that also means there is only so much I can do... That is why, it is so important to recognize where your power as a citizen, lies..." Erza paused, a smile coming over her face. "In choice... The choice to do good and to be good. To call us if you or somebody else needs help, so we can be there." She paused, her smile fading. "I made a choice today... To come up here, and to not apologize to a man who could not even bother to show his face to this press conference, after so demanding it of me... I will not be made into a target tonight... And I will always defend the actions of my subordinates." Erza glanced up, her eyes finding the camera most in front of her. "Jose Porla will not hold me hostage with money or anything else..."

Just as Erza began to say this, a strange noise seemed to sound off. It was almost like a rumble, followed by a crack. Erza stiffened on stage, her body jumping and turning around, just as the large
curtain behind her went flying up, almost alarmingly fast. It hit the ceiling hard, revealing a good-sized metal object on stage. Held up by a tall stand, also made of metal, about five feet in height. The strange object had a certain shape to it, that was unique and flowing as it sat there, completely engulfed in flames. The object causing people to panic and scream, the cameras going dead, just shortly after having caught the object on film.

Erza stood there staring at it, her mouth falling open in disbelief. The flames glowing against her face, but as soon as it was lit, the flames over the object had already started to die. Just as people with fire extinguishers, had come running onto the stage.

Gray had quickly made his way over to Juvia in the panic, as people scrambled out of the building, like there had just been a terrorist attack. She was only standing there in shock at first, until she could see Gray approach in the corner of her eye, she turned away. Her body moving passed Aria who was just standing there, pulling out his phone from the pocket of his coat. Juvia had arrived out in the hall with Gray on her heels, people fleeing out of city hall all around them, in a panic.

"Juvia wait...!" He called, finally catching up with her and taking hold of her forearm. Juvia whipped around quickly, her face so full of alarm. She was pale, but her cheeks were red and she looked beautiful. He paused as she stared at him with wide teary eyes, her anger apparent.

"What the hell was that?! That symbol! Again!" And Gray let her go, his face feeling as though it was cast in ice, his heart sinking. He hadn't known about it, but he did know who was responsible, even if he hadn't known what the reason for it was this time. But... He also couldn't tell her and for the first time, that bothered him. Maybe, because he could see now, how truly afraid this woman was.

"I don't know..." He answered calmly. "I have no idea..."

Banaboster was seated in a chair a good distance away from a small square card table, that was positioned in front of him. The room they were in was rather dark, its only source of light being a blue aquarium, that took up the entirety of the wall Banaboster was facing. Other than that, there hadn't been anything else too noteworthy about the space. Maybe some foreign equipment or machinery, placed somewhere behind Banaboster's chair, but other than that, the weirdest thing about the room; had been Sol. Well, Sol, and the fact that there were sharks...

Though Sol, seemed to be determined to reign on, as leader of the strange; from his residence on top of the card table, one long leg stretching across it, while the other stretched to the ground. A pear in his hand, and a potato peeler in his other. He had been peeling the skins off of pears, before eating them. Taking them from a bowl beside himself on the table, and returning the cores there, once he had polished them off.

He was very distracting as he did this, his eating loud and the strangeness of the act was mesmerizing. He had even offered Banaboster a pear once or twice, exclaiming how much better they were without the skins, but Banaboster had politely declined the offer. His stomach not exactly feeling right or ready for food at the moment.

After about two and half pears later, the door opened and in came Jose. A smile across his face, as he approached Banaboster in quick step.

"Banaboster Goodrich! Just the man I was hoping to see!" Jose greeted, his tone eager and his expression enthusiastic. Banaboster immediately jumped to his feet, a little alarmed at first, but the happy vibe Jose seemed to carry, made him relax a little. The two of them shook hands. "Please have a seat." Jose spoke politely. "I'm happy you could be here." He added, standing in front of the table
"That I do... That I do." He stated, his hands coming out in gesture. "The Shark Tank is indeed a unique location. I only meet with the most notable businessmen here." He announced. "We often find it peaceful and relaxing, yet... Still with a bit of bite and power behind it, as well..."

"Well, you definitely get that here..." Banaboster responded with a smile and both men laughed, as well as Sol who had stood up from his spot on the table and set the peeler down, his eating finally done.

"All right..." Jose began, his smile still intact as he looked down at Banaboster. "Onto business."

"Yea, why did you wanna meet me tonight Jose? As far as I understood it, this was an important night for you." Banaboster questioned.

"Yes... That is was..." Jose answered, his body turning to face the aquarium. "But something else needed to take precedence." He answered, his head turning so that his eye stayed glued to Banaboster. Banaboster could only stare at him in question, his eyebrow going up. "You did well against the police..." Jose continued, turning back to face the man he was speaking to. "You chose a side and you have chosen well; your loyalty is no longer in question." Banaboster was listening intently, though he seemed to have no idea where this was going. "I think I can trust you now, to make the move that would be in your best interest..." Jose advised, his hands clasping together behind his back. Banaboster was staring at him, his mouth open some, in confusion.

"And... What exactly would be in my best interest...?" He then asked, curiosity getting the better of him.

"Why haven't the police been all over you?" Jose then asked. "Do you expect a woman like Captain Erza Scarlett, to leave you be?" He spoke her name with such distaste it was almost as if he would spit.

"I've already got that taken care of..." Banaboster answered, surprising Jose with this bit of news. "I'm leaving town... At least that was the plan, before you sent your goon after me again and brought me here!" Banaboster then explained.

"Ah perfect... So, then you are ready, to make a deal?" Jose answered, a hand reaching out towards Banaboster, but the man in the chair refused to take Jose's hand and was only staring at him in confusion.

"Listen Jose, I don't know what you're talking about! As far as I know, are dealings are done! I know we had bad blood going before... What with you losing my money and me dropping out of the deal... And my guy, get the sense beat out of 'em... But after I told the police that it was Jellal Fernandez who tried to kill me, and not your dumb thug... I thought we were square!" He then snapped, sitting forwards in his chair, but not getting on his feet. "I don't know what more you want!" He then added in outrage and frustration.

"You fool!" Jose snapped, but just as the words sprang from his mouth a phone was ringing. Jose slowly turned his head, to see Sol answering it.
"Sorry Monsieur, tis Aria!" Sol chimed to Jose who then turned back to face Banaboster, as Sol turned away also.

"Listen Jose, I got nothing more to give you... Especially now!" Banaboster snapped.

"How do you not see it... You fat bafoon! I want the location on the docks! I want the casino!" Jose suddenly snapped, but Banaboster threw back his head and laughed at that.

"I'm the idiot?!” He suddenly exclaimed. "I don't have it anymore, you scumbag!" And at that Jose stood up straight his eyes widening with disbelief, his form rigid.

"Monsieur... Jose!" Sol was suddenly speaking up, shouting loudly to speak over Banaboster's laughter. "Please Aria, must speak to you! Tis urgent!" Jose slowly turned around and took a step towards Sol who was offering him the phone.

"Yea go ahead and walk away Jose! How does it feel to not get everything you want?!" Banaboster cackled as he watched the tall man step away. Jose was standing mere inches from Sol, his hand swiping the phone from Sol's grasp, before placing it to his ear, with his back to Banaboster, who would not shut up.

"Aria..." Jose greeted, his tone deep and quiet. There was a pause as Jose listened to the man on the other end of the phone. Banaboster chose the silence as his cue, all the while Aria was filling Jose in on everything that had happened at the press conference.

"You know Jose... It's too bad you didn't find me earlier today... Cause ya see, before I went to the hospital I had a very important meeting... Signed all of the paperwork, crossed all the 'T's, dotted all the 'I's... You know how it works... And honestly it was probably only like an hour or two later that yer man found me..." At this point Sol had backed away from Jose in worry over the outrage, that was sure to come. Sol's eyes stayed on Jose's face, his fear evident and yet Banaboster did not seem to notice as he continued to speak, "Ya see the casino is no longer my problem... And neither are you Jose..."

Jose lowered the phone from his ear very slowly. He stood there staring at the object for a moment, without a word. His eyes moving up from the phone in his hand, to the table he was standing in front of.

"Now..." Banaboster laughed from his seat. "Now yer gonna have to take up your war with the idiot I sold it too!" Banaboster exclaimed, his head going back as he practically howled in laughter. Jose brought his head up, his eyes going up to the aquarium, as a shark invaded his vision.

"Makarov..." Jose then hissed, just under his breath.

"What was that?! Didn't hear you Jose!?” Banaboster questioned between breaths of laughter. Jose then froze up, his head turning slowly, so that his one eye could catch the stubby fat man cackling at him like the king of fools on his thrown.

Jose dropped the phone on the table in front of him, his hand swiping up the other discarded object that had been sitting on the table, the peeler knife. His body twisted around quickly, his arm going up with the object in hand, before he came darting forwards, towering over the laughing and unsuspecting Banaboster in the chair. The man gasped, and attempted to move, but it was already too late, he hadn't reacted quickly enough and there would be no escape,

Jose plunged the peeler knife into the creases of Banaboster's fat neck, then immediately pulled it out, blood protruding from the hole in small spirits. Banaboster's mouth had gone open, his eyes wide
with shock as his complexion immediately paled. He brought a hand up to the hole in his neck, but Jose still maddened by the events; brought his arm back up and then down again. Stabbing the man a second time, in the neck. His teeth crunching together, as he made each strike, no concern for the blood that sprayed over him as he repeated the action several more times.

Banaboster finally fell out of the chair, his body slumping over to the side, blood pouring from his mouth. His hand over some of the holes in his neck as he gurgled and gasped like he was trying to breathe. He attempted to crawl, as if somehow escaping Jose meant escaping death, his one hand out and reaching, but he could no longer move. Instead all he could do was just bleed out, his head finally hitting the cement. His wide-open eyes staring off into the nothingness that was to come, a pool of red forming around his head.

Jose had stayed on his feet, his eyes large circles as he stared at the dying man on the ground. His chest was heaving, his frame tense as he stared at it. His hand around the peeler knife, as Sol did not move. Finally, Jose just threw the knife so hard onto the ground, that it bounced up and jetted across the room with several clacks.

"Makarov!" He then yelled, his voice cracking against the walls of the aquarium, his rage unhinged.

Nightfall had arrived by the time Erza had made it back to her building, her hand reaching for the handle of the loft door when she paused. She leaned her head in close to the door ear first, she could hear voices inside, angry voices. Makarov clearly lecturing someone, but from the sounds of it, he was at the end of his rope. She finally opened the door quickly, bursting in and startling most of the people inside.

"Enough master... It wasn't Natsu's doing. It was my idea." She spoke, her voice firm as she closed the door behind her. Inside Makarov was sitting on one of Erza's chairs. His arms resting on both arms of the chair, his feet nowhere near the ground. To the left of him Cana was sitting on the couch, Indian style with a drink in her hand. Mirajane was standing beside the chair that Makarov was sitting in, her hands clasped in front of her. Wendy and Elfman sat beside Cana on the couch, Elfman hunched over his knees on the end, and Wendy sitting back, in the middle between them. And lastly Natsu was there standing in front of Makarov and facing him, apparently accepting his punishment without fight, unlike normal. Makarov looked to Erza, his eyes on her in question as she stepped near, taking off her coat.

"Erza don't... You don't have too- It's fine." Natsu suddenly spoke up reaching a hand towards her.

"Yes I do." She addressed him with a serious tone, before looking back towards Makarov. "I asked him to do it." She stated. "Do not kick him out, we need him." She demanded and Makarov shook his head.

"Fine..." He spoke. "But I need to understand..." Just as he had begun to say this, the front door burst open once again, and this time it was Gray, who was clearly out of breath. His expression was angry and his body was clearly tense, as he slammed the door shut behind him. His eyes darting around the room until he spotted Natsu.

"YOU!" He suddenly snapped darting towards Natsu with rage, Natsu froze up, his face full of confusion, as Gray suddenly threw a fist in his face. Nastu fell to the ground from the force of Gray's punch, as Gray just stood there and stared down at him. "You ruined everything Natsu!" He was shouting, as Erza and Cana had suddenly jumped up to grab Gray, because he seemed bent on hitting Natsu again.

"Stop!" Erza yelled, wrapping around Gray's arm. "He didn't do it!" She then added, causing Gray
"Well he did..." Cana muttered.

"Yes, but it was my plan! He was doing, what I asked!" Erza explained and Gray immediately seemed to relax upon hearing these words. Natsu sat there on the ground rubbing his face for a moment.

"You?!" Gray questioned in outrage, glancing to Erza as her and Cana had let him go. "Why... Why would you?! Do you know what Jose might do after that?!" Gray asked in outrage, but Natsu was getting to his feet, his hand dropping away from his face.

"He is going to be very angry... That's for sure..." Natsu spoke. "But trust me... This was the right move. We need to bring the fire back to 'im, just as he keeps bringin' it to us." Natsu explained, a grin flashing across his face. "Man Gray... That was one hell of a punch..." He then added, as though it were a compliment

"The angrier he is... The sloppier... The more likely he is to make a bad judgement call... It is important that we do not grant his every wish... Besides, we have already won this battle..." Erza explained.

"That, we did not..." Makarov finally spoke up and now everybody was looking to him. "And you are wrong... The angrier Jose is... The more dangerous he becomes..." There was a pause and Erza finally chose to ask.

"What do you mean we did not...? Didn't Mirajane...?" Erza questioned glancing up at Mira who had her head bowed in shame.

"No..." She finally spoke up. "I failed..." She added and everyone stared at her in question and silence, until she continued. "By the time I met up with Banaboster, he was already in business with somebody else... Somebody who offered so much, that he was unwilling to change his mind, no matter how persistent I was." She explained.

"Wait what...? Who else... Please don't tell me it was Jose...?" Gray suddenly asked and Mira shook her head, her eyes shining.

"No... Not Jose..." She paused. "As of today, the casino and its location are under new ownership and that person is Jude Heartfilia, of the Heartfilia Railroads." Mira glanced over to Natsu a frown over her face. "Or in other words, Lucy's father..."

Lucy and Loke were seated at a table built for two, sitting across from one another at a tiny restaurant in the heart of downtown. The room had a glow of gold that made it appear quite warm, especially when compared to rain and darkness of outside. They had large bowls placed in front of them, full of a broth, noodles, beef and greens that steamed. The two of them looked nice, but they were not overly dressed up, the date clearly being casual. Lucy was smiling at Loke as she watched him eat his noodles with the use of chop sticks. All the while she was just using a fork.

"I wish I was that good at using chip sticks." She stated with a laugh.

"Did you ever learn?" Loke questioned, after downing the bit he had gathered up.

"I guess not officially. I've had very little experience. Definitely never had pho before." She commented, glancing down at the soup in front of her and Loke glanced up.
"Oh yea...? What do you think?" He asked and Lucy nodded her head.

"It's super good!" She spoke, matching eyes with him.

"Right?" Loke responded also nodding.

"Yea." Lucy nodded once more. "Trying new things has kind of been my mantra lately, so if you can think of anything else..." Lucy spoke and Loke nodded in response.

"That a challenge? I'm sure I can." Loke replied, reaching down to pick up a drink, in a rather short glass, sake. He held out his drink towards Lucy. "To trying new things!" He exclaimed and Lucy reached down, also picking up her matching glass.

"To trying new things." She stated with a smile towards him. The two of them cheered, before drinking.

Meanwhile unbeknownst to the budding couple, a tall figure was standing outside amongst the rain, watching them through the tiny restaurant's bay window. He was wearing a hood to shield him from the rain, that had been coming down day. He was an older looking gentlemen, with a blond mustache. He stood there for a moment, his chocolate colored eyes, never once leaving Lucy, before he finally turned on his heel and left. Making a path down the wet and shining streets of Magnolia that night.

Gajeel remembered waking up in a room that was too bright, his eyes squinting against the whiteness. This time he was not in chains, but a hospital bed. His right arm was wrapped in heavy bandages, but he could still feel the sting of his wounds underneath. He thought back, remembering he had escaped the strange place he had been held captive in, before eventually passing out, due to his injuries. Someone had clearly found him and brought him in.

Gajeel pushed his small body up, groaning with the struggle. It took a few seconds without the use of both arms, but soon he was sitting up. His eyes taking in the room and spotting a familiar face, he did not wish to see near the door.

Gajeel immediately stiffened up, upon seeing the tall man he had come to know as Jose. His eyes widening in fear, he began to shift almost as if he was about to make a break for it.

"Don't run boy." Jose suddenly spoke as he hovered near the door and the only way out of the small room. "And don't... Do not be alarmed." He added. "I am not going to hurt you... Not anymore." Jose explained and then there was a silence, as Gajeel could only stare, and so Jose continued. "We know you were telling the truth now..."

Gajeel paused his expression changing from fear, to that of anger and perplexity as he turned his head to look down at his arm. There was silence between them again for time before Jose chose to speak up once more. "You impressed me boy. I'm sorry we had to put you through that... But you see it was necessary-.

"Just stop." Gajeel finally demanded, his tone cold. He was looking forwards, the look in his eye could best be described as distant, but his brow was low. He finally turned his head, his sights landing on Jose. "Just tell me where my dad is... I don't care about anything else."

There was silence once again, a moment of pause between the two, until finally Jose began to walk forwards, further into the room. Gajeel followed the older man's movements, until he finally paused right beside his bedside, his hand coming up.
Gajeel hadn't noticed it at first, but Jose had been holding something and now he was resting the objects down on Gajeel's beside table for him to see. Gajeel stared, his mind trying to decide what it meant and how he should feel. He knew what they were, they were his father's weapon of choice, his black brass knuckles. Gajeel slowly brought his head up, his eyes matching Jose's in question and frustration.

"Gone." Was all he said.

What did gone mean exactly? Dead? Alive? Did he leave, or did Jose make him leave? Was he murdered, or arrested? Did it matter?

No... It doesn't. Came Gajeel's thoughts, as he laid on his bed, several pillows shoved under his shoulder and head, to keep them elevated to a comfortable level, due to his sling. He was still wearing his jeans, but his boots had been discarded to the floor beside the bed. His hoodie had also been taken off and was now wrapped around Levy, who was laying beside him. Her small body was curled up beside his torso, her head using his good shoulder and chest as a pillow. She had her eyes closed, the top of her forehead reaching up by his cheek. Gajeel glanced down at her, she seemed to be breathing softly.

"Levy...?" He suddenly questioned, testing to see if she was awake.

"Hmm...?" She responded softly without opening her eyes. He smirked a little.

"You awake shrimp...?" He then asked, but this time there was no response. Gajeel tried not to laugh, his head turning away from her, so that he could look up at the ceiling. He could feel the laughter in his chest as he heaved, his breaths a bit erratic.

Something was wrong, he wasn't just laughing, he was crying. He could feel the sting in his eyes, as a few stray tears leaked down from the outside corners of his eyes, down into his hair, near his ears.

He turned his head to face Levy again. That's enough for today... I don't need to think about it anymore... He thought taking in the beauty of Levy's peaceful and resting face. He hadn't wanted to be reminded of his past, but as he looked at her, he seemed to come to an understanding, as to why he had been thinking about it all day.

Gajeel then shifted his head over the pillow, his lips reaching her skin. He then placed a kiss on her forehead and he watched as her lips upturned just a bit and he smiled to himself. His chest hurt inside, but it was only, because he had found her. He then moved his head, resting it against the top of hers. His eyes closing at long last, to the first peaceful rest he had, in such a long time.

I try to make it through my life, in my way, there's you

I try to make it through these lies, and that's all I do

Just don't deny it,

Don't try to fight this, and deal with it

And that's just part of it

If you were dead or still alive

I don't care, I don't care
Just go and leave this all behind
Cause I swear (I swear) I don't care
I try to make you see my side
I always try to stay in line
But your eyes see right through
That's all they do
I'm getting buried in this place
I got no room, your in my face
Don't say anything just go away
If you were dead or still alive
I don't care, I don't care
Just go and leave this all behind
Cause I swear (I swear) I don't care
Love changing everything, you won't be left for me
Love changing everything, you won't be left for me
If you were dead or still alive
I don't care, I don't care
Just go and leave this all behind
'Cause I swear (I swear) I don't care
If you were dead or still alive
I don't care (I don't care) I don't care (I don't care)
Just go and leave this all behind
I don't care (I swear) I don't care
At all
"I Don't Care" By Apocalyptica featuring Adam Gontier
Okay let me know if you have any questions. It has been a long time. I would like to know what you all are thinking if you made it this far. Thank you so much for reading! And I apologize for this, but I am skipping my review responses this time… I will get back to you all on the next chapter. Thank you!
Chapter Summary

The rain refuses to let up and Juvia is on a path of self destruction, can anybody save her? Lucy's magical night is ruined by an unexpected visitor. Gray is still under stress. Gajeel and Levy need to work together in a way they never have before. Natsu will come to the rescue. Gajeel and Levy continue to grow closer. Mira makes a grim discovery.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Monster

Chapter 18: Kinship

Juvia could already feel a sheen of sweat gathering over her eyelids as she threw back her fourth shot of straight liquor, her head going back with the quick movement of it before she slammed her small glass back down onto the bar. A rather large man with a muscular physic was standing before her just behind the bar. He was wearing a much too tight T-shirt over his torso. He was a middle-aged man, clean shaven with hardened features that spoke of his experience and a large scar carved into the side of his bald head.

He was watching Juvia perturbed, but she ignored him, keeping her head angled down. Her line of sight was aimed on the four empty shot glasses in front of her, but she wasn’t really focusing in on them or anything else for that matter. The kaleidoscope vision having already taken over, apparent by the way the golden lights bounced off of her eyes. It was all a misty gleam that massed together, as though she were looking at them from underwater and she felt as much. She was suffocating after all, so she might as well drown in her own way.

She avoided the man’s gaze, wanting nothing more than to be served and left alone in her hour of self-pity. Her bangs were hiding the redness and shimmer of her eyes, as the rest of her long hair had been let loose from its clip and was tasseled over her shoulders like a wild lion’s mane.

“Another… Please…” She finally spoke, so softly it was nearly a whisper. The words were raspy and desperate or so the bartender had noticed. In fact, she had sounded damn near dead inside, yet she still remained polite. He folded his burly arms over his chest, his biceps popping out from the tiny sleeves of his shirt. He was frowning, his eyes scaling over her quickly in concern. Juvia was still wearing the same revealing dress that she had been wearing at the press conference, but it was now also damp from the rain outside.

The bartender’s eyes glanced up, taking in the dark and unruly tavern around him. His eyebrows lowering as he noticed he was not the only person who had been eyeing the pretty young lady who sat alone at the bar. The intent of the other gazes in the room, looked far less concerned and much more devilish in nature though.
“Look at me…” The bartender demanded quietly, his eyes still up and settled on the two men who were standing near a pool table in the back, whispering to one another as they stared at Juvia from behind. Their intentions were clear, as the direction of their glances proved to be below her waistline and she seemed to be unaware of this, or maybe she hadn’t cared.

Juvia heard him, her head shakily lifting enough, so that she could match eyes with him. The bartender looked back down at her, taking in the red that had pooled into her cheeks and the demeanor of her bloodshot eyes.

“I know what you are doing…” He spoke. “But girlie… This is not the place for you to do that.” He stated. Juvia’s eyes widened fiercely, almost as if she might protest. “Listen…” He interjected firmly. “I have a daughter probably about your age… I would never let her near this place at night… You gotta go.” He finished with a sorrowful frown. Juvia’s sights shifted back down to the table at that.

“I understand…” She answered unable to argue with him. She hadn’t the energy left to fight anyone anyways.

“Good. I’ll call you a cab then.” He spoke, turning away from her and Juvia could only bring both of her hands up to the sides of her head, grasping through her hair in distress and frustration as she accepted the gesture, despite how broken it made her feel. The truth being so cold and mind numbing, that she could only truly, process one inevitable fact. That she really did have no control in her life. Hell, she couldn’t even self-destruct in the way of her choosing.

A short while later Juvia found herself in the backseat of a cab, her mind still blanketed with the unknown feeling of what was to come next for her. Assuming it to be worst, likely a terrible death at the hands of her employer, Jose. From there, she found herself wondering what the repercussions of her sudden disappearance might bring. Somehow accepting this as an inevitability, as though she had given up already.

It is likely nobody would even notice really… She thought as various faces of people she had met over the years appeared in her mind. People from law school, people from work, people she had met in passing, such as Meredy and Levy. People whom she had been kind with, but had never actually befriended.

Aside from Gajeel… Her mind chimed, her eyes closing at last. He will be okay… Her thoughts consoled, as a youthful image of him looking down at her with a firm expression over his face appeared in her mind’s eye. Clearly a distant memory. He is a survivor and his strength far exceeds my own… It always has… She thought as the image floated there in her subconscious, until it changed to that of officer Gray Fullbuster’s face.

Juvia opened her eyes with a jolt, looking down at the hands folded together in her lap. Despair was stinging at her throat as she finally shifted her head to the side. She began to press the warmth of her forehead, up against the cool glass of the window, as the rain poured down outside. Her mind stuck on the hopelessness of her situation, as she watched the drops leak down the windowpane. Buildings were passing the cab on by in the background of the window, but she barely acknowledged them. That was until a certain one she recognized caught her eye and she finally asked for the driver to stop.

Juvia stepped outside of the cab and back into the rain. They had stopped in front of a 24-hour coinvent store, one that she hadn’t laid eyes on in a long time. She had decided not to bother with having the cab driver wait for her and had paid him and sent him on his way, before disappearing inside of the small store. She walked back out about ten minutes later, this time she was holding a bottle of something in a paper bag.
She glanced around, the rain was falling over her in waves. Her head shifted up, so that she could see the darkness of clouds among the night sky and the tops of the surrounding buildings. It only took mere seconds for her to be completely drenched, but she stood there, her eyes closing for a moment. The cold air hitting her warm face and running over her, as though the rain were cleansing her of her doubts. She brought her head back down, her eyes opening. Her eyelashes thick with the water, and her hair, now dark and shining as it stuck to her neck, shoulders and the sides of her face.

She let out a visible breath of steam, she knew where she was and that meant she knew where she was to go. And so, she began to walk. Walk in the violent and cold rain, in the middle of the night, no coat, no umbrella out, in her dress. Her legs moving with a numbness to them from the cold, as though she were a puppet on strings. Eventually arriving at a park.

The wet sidewalks shined with the glow of streetlamps, but the surrounding area was grainy and dark, thanks to the rain. The grass having a certain squish upon stepping on it, as the water continued to gather up.

Juvia had kept on mindlessly, despite it all, finally reaching the destination she had been searching for. Near the center of the park, there stood a thick willow tree, the branches reaching up and out towards her like embracing arms, but its leaves were raining down in contrast; much like hair, when a head is bowed in mourning. She stood there apart from the tree, the only shelter she would accept from the continuous falling rain.

It had been several hours of the most peaceful night’s rest Gajeel could ever recall having, since dislocating his shoulder, which made the interruption of his phone ringing all the more infuriating. His heavy eyelid’s cracked open upon hearing it, the ceiling of his bedroom coming into view as a pulsing blue light bounced off of it. His brow line lowered as he let out a groan, the noise and vibration of his phone making it apparent that the annoying object was on the pillow, right beside his head. His neck shifted, he noted the weight of Levy’s body was now over his sternum instead of his shoulder. She seemed to have curled up further into a ball as she slept, her head having moved down lower as a result.

Gajeel felt his nerves twinge a bit, he sucked in a deep breath his chest puffing out. His brain was failing to grasp the reality of her truly being there with him, sleeping beside him in his own bed. Quickly realizing he could not allow himself the time to fret over this as the phone continued to go off, he sadly began to move. Finally disturbing the sleeping girl who had been laying over him. His torso lifted up with the aid of his good hand, he groaned a second time with the pain of his shoulder, which was still being supported by a mountain of pillows. He watched in regret as Levy’s head lifted gently, her confusion evident as she too, came awake.

“Sorry…” He muttered, finally managing to get his upper half up enough to reach over himself and grab the phone. Unfortunately, the call had already ended and he had missed it. He glanced down to check the time, before checking to see who had called him, as Levy began to raise up from her spot on the bed.

“No… It’s okay…” She replied gently, her voice raspy from sleep. Gajeel, gave her a small appreciative expression. His lips stretching into a straight line, in which Levy returned the gesture with a small, but tired reassuring smile of her own, before he turned his attention back down towards the phone in his hand.
Gajeel’s hoodie was falling away from her shoulders as Levy sat up, her half-lidded eyes taking in the dark surroundings of his bedroom. Night had clearly come as the two of them had slept and she was quickly realizing that she had no idea what time it was, but she was aware that it was late. She could still hear the sound of heavy rain pouring down outside as it bounced loudly off of the balcony on Gajeel’s lower level, noticeable in the quiet. The large bay windows to their left were essentially black from the darkness of the storm, as a small rumble of thunder sounded off not seconds later. Levy turned her head back towards Gajeel, whose face was aglow and visible all thanks to his phone screen. His brow was low and his expression appeared to be perplexed.

“What’s wrong…?” She questioned him softly, her voice barely above a whisper. Gajeel continued to stare at the phone in his hand, his brow only lowering in further confusion with the question. He shook his head.

“Well it’s just… Juvia called me.” He answered.

“Oh…” Levy responded thoughtfully, her eyes shifting, before glancing back up. “Is that really so strange?” She then asked him, unsure of how things normally worked between the two of them.

“No, not really, except… It’s the middle of the night, so kind of, I guess…” He finally glanced up at Levy. “And the really weird part bout it is, that she didn’t even leave a message like she always does… That makes me feel like somethin’ is wrong… She did have somethin’ kinda big goin’ on tonight… Somethin’ she had been worryin’ about a lot… So now I just kinda wonder why she would call this late… I mean it was just a few minutes ago and there’s no word er nothin’.” He explained, matching Levy’s gaze.

“Well Call her back then…” Levy suggested with a shrug. Gajeel’s brow lifted and he nodded his head.

“Yea… Guess I should, shouldn’t I?” Levy nodded at him and he looked back down at his phone and hit a button. He brought it up to his ear as it began to ring, looking back towards Levy, who was watching him steadily as she sat across from him on the bed. “Sorry bout this…” He muttered to her as the phone continued to ring in his ear. She smiled gently towards him.

“Don’t be.” She replied, shifting her sights back down towards the mattress, her small smile intact. Gajeel could feel the corners of his lips curling up slightly, but he glanced towards the left and did his best to fight off any hints of a smile, as the phone rang for the third time.

“What the heck Rain Woman?” He finally questioned, as the phone had gone to voicemail after numerous rings. “Are you seriously not gonna answer me back…?” He whispered, his concern becoming evident as he immediately hung up on the voicemail and called Juvia again. Levy could feel herself tensing up, as she too could hear the phone still ringing. Gajeel glanced up at Levy, after the second time it had gone to voicemail. The two of them stared at one another, Levy’s expression changing to that of alarm as Gajeel appeared lost. Finally, he hung up and called her once more, for the third time and after about five rings there was the welcoming sound of somebody having answered the phone.

“Juvia?!” Gajeel snapped, but there was no voice at first, only a strange muffling sound. “What the hell…” Gajeel muttered. “Juvia!? Are you there?!” He barked into the phone his head turning away from Levy. “Juvia?” He questioned, his voice becoming more worried.

“Gajeel…” A voice at last, though it sounded feeble.

“Juvia, there you are! What the hell!? Answer me, next time I call you!” He snapped.
“Sorry…” She replied and Gajeel paused. Levy could see the fall in his face, as his expression became grim.

“Wait… What’s wrong? You don’t sound right…”

“I finally understand why now…” Juvia spoke through the phone, though her voice was hard to hear over the loudness of whatever was in the background.

“Understand what? What the hell are you even talkin’ about and where are you right now? It’s hard to hear you!” Gajeel demanded becoming frustrated.

"I understand, why… Why you wanted to keep Levy out of your life…” Juvia replied and Gajeel’s eyes widened.

“Juvia… Where are you right now?” Gajeel demanded once more, but this time his voice sounded less frustrated and more fearful.

“It doesn’t matter now…” She answered, her voice heavy like she might sob. “I’m done Gajeel…”

“What’re you…? What the hell happened?!” He could hear her crying despite the roar of the background.

“You were right… What is even the point of getting close to someone when you are just going to end up dead, anyways…?” Her voice cracked and Gajeel could swear he felt the color drain from his face.

“Juvia… Come on…” Gajeel practically begged her. “You… You gotta tell me where you are! Right fucking now!” He pressed, using his anger to fuel him through the sentence as it seemed to be his go to emotion whenever he was desperate, or in basically any situation.

“I am back to waiting, Gajeel… With only the rain to keep me company… Again… I’ve got nothing else to live for anyways… So I might as well…” Juvia finally spoke, her words coming in clear and devoid of emotion and before Gajeel could say another word, she had hung up on him. Gajeel pulled the phone away from his face, his teeth clenching together as he stared at the object and then slammed it down onto the mattress in a fit. Levy was watching his every move like a cat watching a bird.

“What…? What happened? Something’s clearly wrong.” The last part was a statement.

“Yea…” Gajeel seethed. “Something is definitely fucking wrong!” He added, pushing himself onto his feet with an urgent intensity that caused him to growl with the pain of his thigh. The first thing he did, was push his feet into his large boots

“Where are you going?” Levy asked, jumping to her feet after him as Gajeel headed for the door to his room with great haste.

“I gotta go get her!” He growled as though it were the most crucial thing in the world. Swinging open the door and heading towards the stairs.

“Well wait, do you even know where to go?” Levy questioned him, aware that Juvia had hung up on him, based on his earlier reaction. She grabbed the hoodie he had left behind, from off of the bed and started to throw it on over herself properly as she followed him quickly out of the bedroom. She was able to catch up with him once he had reached the stairs, because of how cautious and slow he had to go down them.
“No. But I think I have an idea.” He answered upon reaching the last two.

“Okay well I want to come with you.” Levy replied urgently upon reaching the last stair just behind him, her arm going through the sleeve of his hoodie. It looked much too large for her, but it would do for a coat against the rain.

“No.” Gajeel stated, making his way towards the coat closet without looking back.

“What do you mean, no? Of course I am!” Levy snapped as Gajeel grabbed a leather coat from the closet. He turned to look at her, doing a small double take once he got a look at her wearing his clothing. He then shook his head after getting over that.

“I don’t want you to.” He stated, meeting her with a serious stare.

“Well you don’t get to decide.” Levy answered him rather demandingly.

“This isn’t funny, Levy.” Gajeel replied. “I don’t know what is wrong with Juvia, but somethin’ had to of happened to her, for her to be actin’ this way and I don’t want you anywhere near it.” He explained, with a new magnitude of seriousness in his voice.

“You think I am disobeying you, because I think this is funny, Gajeel?!” Levy questioned him clearly frustrated. “Look at me.” And he did, matching her eye with his, as she stared up at him so closely, that she looked nearly cross-eyed. “Something is wrong with your friend…” She spoke softly, her face determined. “That isn’t something I take lightly…” She explained, her eyes shifting quickly as she closed her hands into fists, standing up straighter and meeting his eye once more, boldly. “And I am not letting you go alone.” She finished definitively, but Gajeel shook his head, turning away from her in distress almost.

“Come on Levy…” He pleaded. “Nobody is supposed to know yer even here, remember…?” He reminded her, turning away as he attempted to put on his coat, but he absolutely could not, due to his sling making it impossible for him to do. “Or did you forget?” He added, becoming more rattled with frustration, both from her and his troubles with the jacket.

“I did not forget.” Levy answered, finally reaching out as she could not bear to watch him struggle anymore. She reached for his sleeve gently, her voice softening. “We’re just going to have to deal with that, when the time comes…” She explained as Gajeel seemed to have relented finally, and was allowing for her to help him get his arm in the sleeve of his jacket. “Because with the way you are now, you are likely going to need me there, anyways…” She continued, circling around him to help him get the jacket on the rest of the ways, draping it over his sling shoulder. Her eyes reached back up towards his, as she had arrived back in front of him. Gajeel huffed down at her in irritation, yet there seemed to be an air of acceptance in his mannerisms.

“Alright… Ya made yer point, shrimp…” He replied. “Painfully clear.” He added with a roll of his eyes.

“Sorry…” Levy chimed with a small coy smile appearing over her lips.

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“Whatever… Just c’mon.” He answered, turning towards the front door. “We can’t waste any more time; the rain woman needs us. I gotta car on loan in the garage, courtesey of a friend…” He stated. “I can’t wait to get this damn thing off…” He then muttered the last part under his breath as Levy put the hood on over her head and followed him out the door, laughing quietly to herself.

“Right!” She spoke, referring to the part about Juvia. “Does that mean I get to be the one to drive?” She then suddenly asked him, while shutting the door behind them.
“Do you see it?” Loke questioned, his voice essentially hollering over the roar of rain and rapid overflowing of gutters, as water came down in buckets all around them. Lucy and Loke were standing side by side, taking shelter under a small awning attached to the bar they had just walked out of. Cold air and breezy mist, was reaching them from where they stood, as they were caught, and now stuck while choosing to end their date in the middle of mother nature’s brutal cleansing of the Earth.

“Not yet!” Lucy had to call back, speaking loudly enough to be heard despite their closeness. Her eyes were straining ahead through the grainy darkness in search of the cab they had called. Loke also looked on, his customary shades now pushed to his head and his jacket now settled around Lucy’s shoulders instead of his own, as she had been wearing a nice and flowy dress. Her own sweater hadn’t been enough to keep her warm in the recent cold weather, especially during such a harsh rain.

“Oh wait! There!” Lucy suddenly spoke out, her arm outstretching completely in her excitement. Loke stood on his tippy toes, and leaned in Lucy’s direction, to get a proper angle on where she had been pointing.

“Oh yea! You’re right, that must be it!” He replied rather loudly, finally spotting a running vehicle parked across the street and positioned a little diagonally from where they were standing. Lucy pulled the coat a little further over her shoulders with both hands and leaned her head in closer to Loke’s ear.

“He doesn’t appear to be coming any closer, to find us.” She pointed out, not having to be as loud when speaking right in his ear.

“Yea you got that right too.” Loke replied, his eyes still on the car as he had also leaned his head down towards her, so he wouldn’t have to yell, but his voice was still louder than normal. He turned his head towards her, catching Lucy’s gaze with his own; a charming grin coming over his face. “Looks like we’re going to have to make a break for it.” He stated.

“Oh no!” Lucy whined, but his smile was contagious and so she was laughing as she said this. Loke then took up her hand with his own, and brought both of their clasped hands up in front of them, his head leaning towards her with the same playful smile over his lips.

“You got this?” He then asked and Lucy glanced away from him, her brow lowering in determination, as she set her sights on the car in the distance. Her other hand held to his coat tightly.

“Yea I got this!” She exclaimed with vigor.

“Okay, so on the count of three then!” Loke replied, his head turning back forwards while still holding their hands out. “We run!”

“Let’s do it!” Lucy exclaimed, as the two of them planted their feet in the ready position, their hands still together and both of their eyes aimed ahead.

“One!” Loke called out and the both of them, lowered their heads. “Two!” He then shouted, as the grip on Lucy’s hand tightened. “THREE!” He finally called out and they were both off without even a breath between them. Holding onto each other tightly, as they faced the waterfalls in their paths, head on.

They had been doing alright and making a quick pace until about halfway through, when Loke felt the sunglasses on top of his head slide back and fall off, right in the middle of the flooded street. He
stopped immediately, putting on the breaks so fast, that Lucy had to let him go and came to a
screeching halt herself, when she felt the jerk of his hand releasing hers. She turned around, just as he
was picking them up and jogging towards her. The both of them becoming absolutely drenched in
the process. Loke practically crashed into her, pushing her forwards.

“GO! GO! GO!” He was shouting, smiling all the while, as she took back off running with him
holding onto her arm. They finally made it to the car, practically running into the door together, as
they slipped in the cold wetness of the street. Loke did his best to shield her as Lucy ripped open the
car door. “Get in! Get in!” He was yelling, before jumping in himself and slamming the door shut
behind them. The two of them were both laughing so hard upon entering the car, that they could
hardly breathe, leaving the driver to only stare at them in bemusement from his mirror.

“Look at me?! I’m soaked!” Loke replied between laughs, his arms up.

“Hey! It’s not like you’re the only one!” Lucy replied also laughing.

“Aren’t you glad I didn’t let you walk home now?! You would have drowned!” Loke stated with a
large grin over his face and Lucy could only laugh more in reply.

“Yes, yes! You were right okay?! I thought it was going to let up eventually though, not get worse!”
She replied, moving her wet hair to one side of her neck, attempting to ring it out and Loke could
only shake his head as he smiled at her.

“Excuse me… Where were you two wanting to go?” The cab driver finally spoke up interrupting the
clearly ecstatic couple’s moment. Loke glanced up still smiling, eyeing the driver.

“Oh sorry!” He chimed, pausing. “I don’t know.” He then answered before turning back towards
Lucy. “Say Lucy… Were you wanting to come over tonight?” He then asked her, suddenly feeling
good about the moment, as she continued to brush her fingers through her wet hair. She froze,
straightening up and looking up at him, her mouth opening slightly as she hadn’t expected the
question. Loke watched her, still smiling, his eyes gentle, he could swear her cheeks were reddening
just ever so slightly. He had a feeling she was going to say yes, but then she jolted, her head turning
down and her eyes lowering.

“Ugh… I can’t!” She finally answered as though she had just remembered something. “Or… At least
I shouldn’t.” She added in frustration, she then looked back up to him, her eyes becoming sorrowful
and her expression changing to that of worry. “I’m sorry, but I forgot I have to work like first thing in
the morning!” Loke’s smile didn’t diminish, it only changed, becoming warmer. He could see that
she appeared distressed about the situation, as she reached out towards him, resting a hand on his
wrist and leaning in closer. “But I swear, if it wasn’t for that! I would! Really!” She explained and
Loke began to cut her off.

“Lucy… It’s alright… Really!” He chimed, his voice light. “Don’t worry about it, I mean it. I believe
you and trust me… I’m in no hurry.” He explained, still smiling.

“Are you sure… I feel bad, I’m having a good time and I don’t want the night to end, but I just…”

“No way.” Loke interjected. “Don’t feel bad. I’m having a good time too, but hey…” He shrugged.
“It’s gotta end sometime, right?” He questioned and Lucy could only nod, her eyes lowering, but a
small smile came over her lips. She then wrapped her arm tightly around his, leaning in close to
where his elbow was.

“Thank you…” She answered softly, no longer looking at him, but ahead, her eyes closing gently as
she cuddled up next to him in the backseat. Loke glanced down at her in slight surprise, before a soft
smile grew back over his lips. He glanced back up towards the cab driver and began to tell them where they needed to go.

Lucy and Loke spent the rest of their drive, in a tranquil silence, leaning in close to each other as it wore on. The heat in the car was circulating, making them comfortable despite both being wet and the drive was made all the more peaceful with the buffer noise of rain in the background. Lucy felt near ready to fall asleep, a serene smile still planted over her lips as Loke had his cheek resting over the top of her head. Sadly, the moment had to end abruptly as the cab pulled up to the front of Lucy’s apartment building.

Loke nudged Lucy gently so that her eyes would open, he knew she wasn’t asleep. She lifted her head up and off of his shoulder and glanced up at the window, before shifting her gaze back towards him regretfully. He only smiled back at her weakly and with that, she sighed and Loke nearly chuckled, he then opened the door.

It felt as though the rain had finally slowed down some, to the point where it was no longer waterfalls at least, but it was still coming down pretty good. Thankfully it wasn’t nearly as loud anymore so they could hear each other speak at last. Loke stepped out of the car, moving out of Lucy’s way and holding open the door, as she too stepped out.

Once they were both standing outside in the less ferocious rain, Lucy took the coat from around her shoulders and began to wordlessly offer it back to Loke. He brought a hand up and pushed it back towards her.

“No, no, my fair lady… Consider it a parting gift for now.” He stated.

“A parting gift? But… It’s raining… You need your coat.” Lucy answered, but Loke could only shake his head, a serene smile over his lips.

“Not really sure, what good it is going to do me now that I am already soaked…” Loke shrugged. “And besides…” He paused. “This way… You are going to have to see me again, in order to give it back, right…? So really… Consider this a selfish gesture.” He explained, his smile growing into a full out cheeky grin and Lucy felt her lips upturning just the same. She brought the coat back in close to her chest with both arms wrapping around it.

“Oh I see… Pretty clever.” She chimed, leaning her head in closer as she winked at him.

“Right? I thought it was a pretty full proof plan myself…” Loke chimed and Lucy giggled at him gently, before they both just paused and gazed at one another, still both smiling.

“Well… Thank you Loke… For a good time tonight…” Lucy finally spoke, her voice soft as she took a modest step closer.

“Well thank you for coming out…” Loke answered having to look down at her as she came so near to him. Lucy was giving him a faint smile, her expression very coy as she awkwardly stared up at him, due to him being so close. She brought a hand up to his shirt, touching the collar delicately, her eyes moving to her own fingers.

“Yea… It’s too bad, it has to end early…” Lucy spoke off handedly.

“You know what they say…” Loke offered. “Good things come to those who wait…” He finished and with that Lucy glanced back up at him. Her face was suddenly drawing in close as she pulled him a little aggressively towards her in return, now with both hands on either side of his collar,
holding onto the fabric tightly. She then began to kiss him in such a way, that it had Loke’s shoulder practically going slack in her grip, as he melted into the longevity of Lucy’s kiss. She then pulled away, her face only mere inches from his as she continued to stare up at him.

“Hopefully… If you’re lucky, they just might.” She answered with a smirk and Loke could only stare at her for a moment as she pulled away from him further, still smirking, nearly laughing at his amazed expression. He looked impressed to say the least, a smile coming over his face again as he watched her back away a few more steps.

“I’m willing to take those odds!” He called to her, as he watched her go.

“Good!” She answered back, finally turning away from him with a grin over her face as she began to cross the street. Loke watched her for a moment, still smiling at her, his heart beating fast.

*Jesus I might love this girl…* He thought with a pant still watching her walk away, as she slung his coat over her shoulders.

“Goodnight Lucy…” He said it softly, his words getting lost in the sound of the rain, before finally getting back into the car and closing the door.

Lucy giggled to herself as she listened to the cab behind her drive away. Her cheeks a bit rosy, as she stepped up to the walkway of her apartment building, her eyes aimed at the ground. She was still picturing Loke’s amazed face, while approaching the door, so lost in her excited thoughts about it, that she didn’t even notice the dark hooded figure watching her approach. Her head was still aimed down, when the stranger’s feet came into view on the stairs as she began to step up.

Upon seeing this, Lucy instinctively jumped back, leaving about a three-foot space between her and the strange person who was at the top of her apartment’s stoop, looking down at her and clearly blocking the door. Her feet stood planted apart in a ready stance, should she need to start running away. Her arms were out as though she might try and tackle the tall figure, one was near her pants pocket, close to where her phone resided. The person was most definitely looking at her, noticeable by the direction of their head and which way it was facing. Unfortunately, she was unable to make out their features due to the darkness of the rain and the hood masking their face.

She could feel her frame going rigid out of fear and her jaw dropping in shock, goosebumps had appeared over her arms and legs. Lucy’s eyebrows lowered, her fight or flight instinct was taking over, with ultimately the fight side taking initiative in this scenario. Her eyes stayed glued to the figure, while her hand swiftly reached into the small purse over her shoulder only to whip out something and hold it up high, towards the person in front of her.

“I don’t know who you are, but you better fucking move, or you can count on getting a mouthful of this!” Lucy snapped, her fingers on the trigger of what appeared to be a small container full of pepper spray or mace.

“Lucy…” Came a voice and Lucy immediately dropped her arm and stood up straight, her shoulders slumping in disbelief as her eye’s widened, only because she knew that voice all too well.

The figure brought his hands up to the hood of his rain coat, pulling it down to reveal a middle-aged man, with dark eyes and a thick mustache. His hair was short and neatly slicked back; gold in color, in much the same sheen as Lucy’s hair. His facial structure was pretty average, with his jaw being box shaped and his brow line being a little higher than most; and only a few minor crevices of age beginning to show around his forehead and underneath his eyes. His stance was proud and high, as
he stood above Lucy on the stairs, like that of a man with power, always looking down upon those beneath him.

“Dad….?” Lucy gasped flabbergasted as Jude Heartfilia tucked his arms behind his back, bringing them together as though he were a sage.

“Yes, Lucy. It is me.” He stated with his gruff voice, his tone somewhat annoyed.

“What’re-What are you doing here?” Lucy questioned, too astonished to be angry or anything else for that matter; at a complete loss.

“I am in town on some new business investments and overseeing the arrangements personally.” He answered simply.

“What?! What kind of- investments?!” Lucy questioned him in disbelief, her tone becoming more urgent by the second.

“That is of no concern to you, Lucy.” He answered firmly. “Not while you are still willingly denying your future, as head of the Heartfillia namesake.”

“Excuse me!?” Lucy suddenly snapped.

“You heard me.” He replied with a sour voice, before changing his tone. “Besides that, there is another reason why I am here. To see you.”

“Oh, yea I got that!” Lucy snapped, her anger finally coming forwards as she said this rather sarcastically. “Seeing as you basically stalked me here! How the hell did you find out where I live?!?” Lucy then asked him, her eyes narrowing in on the man through the rain.

“That hardly matters right now Lucy, considering the direness of the topics we need to discuss instead.” Jude answered his eyes closing and his head shifting towards the door. “Now I suggest you open this door and we can take our conversation inside and out of the rain. You’ve really left me no choice, but to show up unannounced at such a late hour, since you will not return any of my calls.”

“You want me to let you in?! Right now!? To talk?!!” Lucy responded incredulously, her voice only growing with each word.

“If you have time to see that young man you were just with, then you most certainly have time to meet with me as well. Your father.” Jude answered, his eyelids lifting back up and landing on Lucy in one fierce demanding gaze.

Lucy stood there, her frame stiff and shaking, as her fists began to close tightly at her sides. Loke’s coat was still hanging over shoulder as she lowered her head, so that her father would not be able make out the furious expression over her face, from his high angled perspective over her.

“Oh so that’s it… Huh..?” She suddenly asked him in a low voice between gritted teeth. Jude turned his head, his eyes widening in confusion. “You get to decide what I have time for now too…” She added darkly. “We’ll see about that…”

“What is it you are mumbling about now, Lucy?” Jude suddenly asked in annoyance. “Can’t you see that it is raining?! Now open this door, so we can go inside! It is of the upmost importance that we finally have this conversation, that you have been avoiding for months...” He suddenly demanded, his voice rising with anger.

“No!” Lucy suddenly shouted so loudly, that her voice echoed even amongst the rain. Jude’s eyes
widened, his head snapping up in alarm. “I will stand out here all fucking night if I have too!” She bellowed out, in breath rattling anger. “You are not welcomed in my home! Not ever!” She continued with rage so fierce, that Jude for once, genuinely looked afraid.

Then without warning she held up her hand again, pointing the pepper spray back at him and moving towards him in a hurry.

“You know what, no! Forget staying out here! I’m going into my apartment and you are not coming in with me! So I suggest you move!” She snapped demandingly and he did; so quickly in fact that he nearly stumbled over his own feet, down the three steps of the stoop, as Lucy moved passed him still pointing the container right at his face. Now she finally had her back at the door of her own apartment building, as she stood above him. Her father meanwhile, stood at the bottom of the steps, his eyes wide as Lucy matched his stare with her very own crazed version of his same gaze.

“Lucy!” Her father suddenly scolded. “Stop it! You are acting like an animal! Put that down!” He snapped.

“Shut up-” She seethed in a shaky breath as her finger tightened over the trigger of the spray. Jude froze in his spot once more, as he could see her hand shaking. “Or I will spray you…” She breathed out, her eyes still wide.

Jude’s hands came up, very slowly to the defensive position, as Lucy took a small step backwards without turning her gaze away from him. Her hand was reaching behind her for the door handle. She grasped it and then quickly turned her head, scrambling with shaking hands and pulling out her key and unlocking the door. She could hear Jude beginning to shift again, which instantly caused her to snap her head back up, and stiffen her outstretched hand.

“Stay back!” She screamed and he dared not move again.

After what felt like an eternity of Lucy scrambling in her panicked state to just get inside of the building, she had managed to finally get the door open. She breezed inside, slamming it shut behind her before falling back against it, in exhaustion. All of the exerted energy from her hysteria, was beginning to take hold in the form of a heavy trembling and weakness; all of the color having drained away from her face with it. She was gasping for air, doing her best to recover when she suddenly heard a hammering on the door and felt the jolts of someone banging on it, causing her to jump off of the door and stare at it fearfully.

“We are not finished here, Lucy! I will be staying in Magnolia now, so you cannot avoid me like this for forever!” He was shouting from behind the door and Lucy’s head lowered. Her eyes closing, as the warm tears just began to leak down from her eyes, in much the same fashion as the rain had been coming down all night. Quiet, but flood worthy.

It had been about thirty minutes since Makarov and most of the other’s had left Erza’s loft, after having spent several hours in a meeting discussing everything in relation to Jose and the Phantom Organization. Now only Natsu and Gray remained in her company, as Erza herself sat on the arm of the chair Makarov had been sitting in earlier. She was holding a mug full of camarilla tea in one hand and sipping on it carefully. Her pajama pants were dawned, and her red hair was tied up into a very long ponytail that cascaded down her back.

Natsu was sitting to her right in one of the kitchen chairs, facing the wrong way. His chest leaning against the back of it, as his arms hung down in front of him. Gray was sitting across from Natsu on the couch, his body slouched forwards with his elbows resting over his knees and his hands over his face. He seemed to keep his head bowed in remorse.
The old man had been a bit hard on him, though it had been out of love, Erza knew it hadn’t been easy for Gray to endure. Hell, she too had been chewed out, mostly for acting so recklessly; her scene on live television that evening, having caused quite a lot of alarm amongst the small group. That, and she had allowed for Gray’s plan to go off, without even so much as a warning about it, to headmaster Makarov.

Erza was no fool; she had realized from the beginning that Gray’s plan, while clever, was incredibly dangerous for him and possibly others. But her judgment, at the time of his proposal of it, had been a bit skewed. And she had agreed to let him do it, too upset and hungry for revenge to fully recognize how disastrous it could potentially end up being. Not letting Makarov know about it was where she had really gone wrong though, in her mind at least.

Erza shifted her eyes over to Gray. *He expected better of me…* She thought, thinking of the Master’s disappointed expression, when he had been filled in on everything. Provoking Jose and allowing for Gray to take on something of such magnitude and danger, had been the wrong choice, or so they had been told tonight.

*Now look at him…* Her thoughts continued as she stared at Gray. *He is in too deep already… And he is drowning in all of this… Just as I have been…* Erza closed her eyes as she took another sip of her tea. Its warmth was filling her from the inside out and bringing her some much-needed comfort. The guilt was there within her, but there was also a small part of her, that felt a lot less alone now. Now, that somebody else was finally feeling the brunt of the tension, that she had been feeling all along. She had felt quite alone and naked even since Jellal had disappeared that first night with Aria.

Her eyes opened slowly. *There’s no going back now. We are in this.* Her brow lowered as she came to this conclusion. Her thoughts on Jellal, still recovering in her bedroom as they all sat there worrying. Meanwhile Natsu tilted his head, his onyx eyes finally resting over Gray as well.

“Hey man…” He spoke up, interrupting the silence that had settled between the group. “You don’t look so good…” Gray made no movement or indication that he was even listening, and so, Natsu continued. “You alright over there?” He asked at last.

There was a long drawn out pause where Erza and Natsu both just watched Gray in anticipation. Finally, after about fifteen seconds he began to move again, pushing a hand through his hair, but keeping his head bowed in much the same way as it had been. His other hand went down to his knee and his eyes stayed on the floor.

“Yea… I just…” He began, struggling. “I just haven’t really gotten any sleep in the last few days…” Came his voice, laced in something akin to frustration, but it was more exhausted. “That’s all…” He finished.

“Oh…” Natsu chirped. “Well maybe you oughta go home and do that.” He suggested.

“Yea…” Gray sighed, uncharacteristically agreeing with Natsu. He shifted a little, his hands moving in such a way, that it was almost like he did not know what to do with them. They both went to his knees instead and he rubbed them over his pants, almost as if his palms were sweaty. “Yea… I just… I’ve been running around like a chicken without my head all day so… Just kind of worried I can’t now…” He still did not look up, but he scoffed.

“That’s understandable Gray…” Came Erza’s voice at last, calm and quite the opposite of his. She was now sitting with her legs crossed. “You’ve had a lot on your plate the last few days… You’ve been covering for me…”
“No, it’s not just that…” He finally looked up, matching her eyes as he said this. He then looked to Natsu. “Look man… I’m sorry for the way I acted earlier. Punching you without even knowing…” Natsu only smirked in return.

“Whoa hey now… Since when do you apologize for hitting me? And listen, it’s no big deal… If anything, it was impressive… There was a lot of force packed behind that punch…” Natsu chimed in, still smirking.

“Yea… Well… Chalk that up to me being so stressed out.” Gray answered, also smirking slightly himself, but the tiny smile did not last. “This thing with Jose… And what he might do to Juvia…” His hands came up in distress. “I don’t know…” He then began to cradle his head again, his elbows back down to his knees. “It had me scared for her… Ya know…? Mostly, because I can see how afraid she is… And I gotta figure… This woman knows how Jose, works… She knows, there’s a reason to be scared.” He paused, his eyes moving over the floor. “I really felt like… She was depending on me somehow. Like her life was in my hands, the moment I told her I would help her…” He looked back up to Natsu. “I still feel that way… Somehow, responsible.” Natsu’s brow lowered, his smirk gone.

“So, that was a punch full of emotion then… That’s why it was so strong… You were fighting for someone.”

“No, more like just taking out of my rage and stresses on the wrong target.” Gray answered, his voice full of frustration. “For no god damn reason.”

“It wasn’t for no reason…” Erza chimed in once again, and Gray looked to her. “You have every right to feel the way you do… Jose, is as ruthless as we all imagined him to be and more. So, we just need to be smarter, going forwards…” She paused. “And more importantly, you need to get some rest for the time being. You cannot help anyone, including Juvia, in the state you are in right now.” She explained. “We need you to get some sleep, so that you can be sharper… And besides… Was it not you, who told me the very same thing, only a few days ago, when I needed to hear it?” She then asked and Gray could only stare at her with nothing to say.

“I think she’s right man…” Natsu spoke up, causing Gray to shift his head. “You’re no good like this, it will make you weak too…” Natsu added, suddenly glancing down at his own body as some music began to play. He began to reach into his hoodie pocket, pulling out his phone. “Sorry.” He said glancing at the screen, his brow lowering in confusion. He then brought it up to his ear and stood up quickly from the chair he had been sitting in and turned away, his back now facing Gray. “Lucy?” He questioned the person over the phone. “What’s wrong?” Came the next question very quickly.

Erza and Gray began to exchange concerned looks to one another, as Natsu spoke to a very clearly, upset Lucy over the phone. His words came slow in an attempt to be calming, but to no avail.

“Okay yea, I get it. No, I’ll be right over. Just gimme like two seconds, then I’ll be right there.” His tone was urgent, as he glanced over his shoulder at Gray. “Yea okay, okay, bye.” He finally said, pulling the phone back down and away from his face. He looked to Gray then Erza. “I gotta go.” He finally said, stating the obvious. His body turning hastily.

“Yea I think we got that, is she going to be okay?” Gray questioned, both of them looking alarmed as they looked to Natsu.

“Yea I think she will. She’s just upset.” Natsu answered quickly, his body moving towards the door. “Her dad basically jumped her and now she doesn’t wanna be alone.” He explained as Erza and Gray both stood up.
“Do you want us to go with you?” Erza questioned and Natsu only shook his head.

“No… I think it’s too personal, this time… I’ll go alone. She will be okay once she has some company, I’m sure.” He explained and Erza set down her tea on the end table, before folding her arms.

“Okay, good luck then.”

“Her father is that asshole, Jude Heartfilla… So… Nobody can blame her for being upset. I think you got the right idea, by just heading over there.” Gray chimed in, as he sat back down on the couch, just as Natsu reached the door. Natsu paused upon hearing Gray’s words, his hand was on the doorknob. He straightened back up to his full height.

“Gray…” He spoke, causing Gray to look back up at him, as he stood frozen in front of the door.

“Yea?”

“Ya know, If yer really that worried… You should reach out to her… This Juvia person… Just to see how she is… It might ease your mind.” Natsu suggested and at that Gray turned back forwards, a small smirk appearing over his lips.

“You’re right.” He answered, his head bowing and his eyes closing. “I will keep that in mind, thanks Natsu.”

“Sure…” Natsu replied, before opening the door. “I’m off…” Came his last words as he quickly raced down the hall of Erza’s building, the door shutting in his wake. Erza kept her gaze glued to the door Natsu had just disappeared from.

“So… What are you thinking?” She then asked him.

“I think I might take his advice.” Gray answered. “But first…” He opened his eyes and looked up to Erza. “I’ll take yours… I’ll go home just as you said and get some sleep…” Erza smiled at him and nodded.

“Sounds good to me.” She agreed.

Juvia was sitting over the damp terrain of the park, her legs bent in such a way that they were nestled underneath her body. Her fingers were numb and curled up around the neck of a bottle that was resting on the ground beside her. Her other arm was out to the opposite side of her frame, her knuckles leaning against the root of a rather robust tree; the one she had chosen to sit underneath. Her skin was a ghostly white and practically aglow in the darkness due to being soaked, with the exception of some slight warmth showing in her cheeks. Her eyelids were about halfway open, her expression devoid of all emotions as she sat there, nearly hidden underneath a mass of tangled and soaked cobalt hair.

This had been it… The spot she had been searching for earlier and now she had arrived there in much the same position as she had been in, all of those years ago. Alone with nowhere to go and nothing to do, but wait. The only exception being, that at least now she had the luxury of being of age enough to drink her misery away this time around.

Her eyes were slowly drifting to the right of herself, as she thought about this. Moving there slowly, until they landed in the near vicinity of where her hand with the nearly empty bottle was. Or at least close enough, before her head began to slowly rattle back. She could hardly recognize how much she was actually trembling, her body was so cold from onslaught of weather and lack of dress, but
also so numb due to all of the alcohol she had managed to soak up into her system. Her only awareness seeming to be that she knew she was drunk. Something she knew well enough to know, that she should not even bother trying to stand up in her current state, but that didn’t matter anyways, because she hadn’t ever intended too since coming there in the first place. All she had wanted to do was sit in her spot and listen. Listen to the rain and remember.

Juvia bowed her head, her heavy eyelids closing, the sound echoing within her ears like a pattern. Splashes, and pitter patters. Water flooding and gushing; a sound and smell that could only best be described as loneliness. She could feel those frigid temperatures hitting the base of her heart and growing over it, from the bottom up. She was the very definition of gloomy. And it was with that realization, that she felt as though nothing in her life had changed, despite her best efforts. She had somehow managed to cycle back around to being right back at the start again.

Juvia thought back, how long had it been now? She wasn’t entirely sure anymore. She hadn’t been paying attention after all. Ten years at least, her brain seemed to remind her. She hadn’t thought about it in a long time, because she had always tried her best not to. It was easier that way, because otherwise it hurt too much and it got in the way. But unfortunately, when faced with a rain such as this, Juvia found she could not resist.

The nostalgia was too overcoming and thus without fail, the familiar image of her mother would often return to her mind whether she willed it to or not. A beautiful woman, or so Juvia had thought so, in her youth at least. A lady of average height and shoulder length cerulean hair, and dark eyes. She had been thin, much thinner than Juvia herself was now, and her face had shown that. Her cheekbones were apparent and her eyes had held a bit more age to them. And there may have been a hint of freckles on her face, but it was hard to say if Juvia could recall the more minute details after so many years of not seeing her.

Juvia narrowed her eyes deep in thought, now remembering the peculiar way she had grown up with the person who had given birth to her. A lot of different places came to mind, a whole charade of different apartments and houses within the confines of the city. They had moved in and out of so many places; normally always living with other people. Most of them having been men whose faces and features were hardly memorable anymore, let alone their names even if some of them had been nice, which often times they were not.

Her mother had always been quick to jump ship, as soon as things got even the slightest bit dicey. She would often work late into the night, returning home to wherever they had been staying, at the near crack of dawn. Sometimes waking Juvia up in the middle of the night, so that they could leave right on the spot, taking nothing with them. Disappearing into the night, before whoever else was with them, could even realize they were gone.

It had been like that for a long time. Much longer than a time, that Juvia could recall having one apartment to live in, as they had, had in her very early childhood. It had been tiresome, but Juvia had accepted it in her youth as just the way life was. Too young to understand that things could be different. Having no outline to compare it too, she hadn’t understood for a long time that it was actually lunacy.

All she had, had was her mom, the only constant and consistency she had thought she needed. Her beautiful mother, who was always pulling off these crazy feats to somehow take care of the two of them. Until finally, the day they had stopped at the convenient store. The very same store, Juvia had picked up the bottle she was drinking from, at.

Her mother and her had stopped there together, to purchase some cigarettes. Juvia remembered her mother having picked up smoking more heavily at the time. Almost as though, it had become
something of a nervous habit. From there they had walked to the park. She could remember that as well, as it had been sprinkling lightly while they were on their way. But that had been okay, they had, had the umbrella over their heads.

Finally, once they had arrived at the park, Juvia had gone running out from underneath the umbrella upon spotting a large tree. This part of the memory was faint, but she could recall laughing and reaching up towards the skies in her excitement. Her mother had stood apart from her, watching from a nearby bench, not sitting, just standing beside it. The umbrella still over her head, as she continued to smoke a cigarette.

Juvia’s eyelids were beginning to open back up wide, as she thought back to that day with vivid accuracy this time. Now questioning herself with heartbroken frustration.

*How the hell did I not see it?* She thought. *She had been so… Nervous…* The image was there in her brain, her mother’s hand had been quivering, as she brought the cigarette up to her lips. Breathing it in slowly as she watched Juvia circle around the large tree, her eyes looking up at it with amazement. Then came the words only minutes later, as her mother offered up the umbrella.

*“Wait, right here…”*

Juvia leaned her head back, resting it against the wood of the tree behind her. Her eyes going up towards the labyrinth of branches above her head. She could feel the cold now, but the source of it, was all inside.

She had refused the umbrella, telling her mother that she *didn’t need it*. She had, had the shelter of the tree to cover her from the rain after all. Why would she need an umbrella if she was to wait underneath it for only a short while? Her mother had only smiled at her and then walked away without so much as another word.

Juvia closed her eyes once again. Something akin to a sigh was stuck inside of her throat.

*What a fool I was…* She thought, feeling a form of shame that made her chest and back ache. *“Wait right here Juvia…”* Came the words in her mind. She could hear them, hear them in her mother’s voice and she closed her eyes tighter, her head still leaning back and facing up.

*“I am waiting right here…”* She uttered in a weak voice, that was lost in somewhere among the rain and time.

She had waited all right. She had waited for three full days for her mother to come back. During a week of endless rain, as though the sky was mourning for her. Only leaving her spot under the tree to use the restroom from time to time. Sleep finding her during portions of the day for only a few hours at a time. Her body aching, and suffering from the onslaught of weather and cold. And finally, when she was at her weakest, people began to notice her there.
The park had been rather empty most days, due to the nonstop rain that week. Most people were remaining inside, the homeless had took to sleeping under bridges instead of at the park, but that did not mean Juvia was completely alone. On the third day she had garnered the attention of three boys, not much older than herself, but still of age enough to be in a stage of adolescent rebellion.

She had been resting her eyes, sitting with her back to the tree, when the three of them had approached. The coolness of their shadows hanging over her and causing her to open her eyes. The first of the three boys who stood the closest, was one of average build and height. He had a pretty face and short brown hair, with a set of alluring green eyes. He stood between his two friends, a football tucked under his arm. The boy to his left was heavy set, with gold hair and a sweatband around his forehead. His chubby cheeks were sun kissed and littered in freckles. And lastly, the boy to the right was tall and awkwardly skinny. His face mousy and his skin very pale, with a mop of thick black hair over his head.

The three of them stared at Juvia, their expression’s changing to that of the menacing sort, as they took her in. Unsure of what to make of some girl, just sitting there in the rain by herself, dirty and wet looking.

“What are you homeless?” The pretty boy addressed her first with an eyebrow raised.

“You look ridiculous! Like a… Like a wet rat!” Came the taunts of the chubbier one beside him, with a laugh.

“Yea no kidding… Get lost homeless girl.” The pretty boy then demanded with a stern voice. “I don’t want to have to look at you, while we’re practicing.”

“I can’t…” Juvia responded meekly. “I need to stay here…” She then managed to get out.

“Oh! So, you can speak then?!” The pretty boy responded, becoming more aggressive in tone. “That means you understand what I said, when I told you to, ‘get lost!’” He added, his anger apparent.

“I understand…” Juvia answered softly, matching eyes with him, but his face only contorted into that of disgust. “But I am waiting for someone… And I need to wait here.” She continued, basically pleading with him to not make her go.

“Do I look like I care?! I told you to leave, you little rat!” He finally snapped, suddenly reaching for her in his frustration. Juvia’s eyes widened as he grabbed at her arm and whipped her up so fast, that she was on her feet in an instant. “Can’t believe you are making me touch you!” He retorted in distaste, as he began to yank her away. Juvia was already beginning to cry, doing her best to fight him off and not be dragged away from the tree, as she began to scream hysterically.

“NO! PLEASE! I HAVE TO STAY HERE!” She cried out between tears, attempting to pull her arm free of his grip. Her feet were sliding on the slick ground as the boy dragging her clenched his jaw and tightened his hand around her wrist. “SHE TOLD ME TO WAIT HERE!” Juvia cried out, her voice echoing across the park.

“Shut up!” The chubbier one complained. “You’re so loud!”

“Will you guys help me out, here?!” Came the frustrated voice of the boy who was trying to lead Juvia away. The silent, but tallest of the three boys, began to reach for Juvia, putting his lanky arms around her, as if he had planned to pick her up with a bear hug.

“Wait, who’s that?” Came the voice of the chubbier one again, just as Juvia’s feet left the ground.
“What are you talking about-” The pretty boy who had started manhandling Juvia began to question his friend. His head turning back forwards, just as he was getting struck in the face by a flying fist. The impact hard enough, that it caused him to fall down. His legs slipping in the mud, so that he would land face down into it. His grip over Juvia now sequentially gone, as his two friends immediately jumped back in alarm. The tallest, still holding onto Juvia, as they both stared slack jawed at the newcomer before them.

He was of decent height for a kid, not nearly as tall as the awkward boy who was currently grappling Juvia, but still, above average for a boy of his age. His skin was of a darker complexion and he was wearing a black sweatshirt with a gray hood, and with the sleeves recklessly cut out, to showcase a rather fresh-looking tattoo inked over his right shoulder. He had on a pair of gray cargo pants and dark heavy looking boots. His eyes were red and he had two stud piercings over his left eye where his one eyebrow should have been. He smirked, revealing what appeared to be fangs, his dark spiky hair adding to the devilish nature of his overall appearance.

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“Hi.” Came his only response, as he gripped the wrist of the hand he had just used to punch the first kid with.

“Who the hell are you?! Some gang member?!” Came a question from the chubby one as he stared at the tattoo over Gajeel’s shoulder.

“Maybe…” Gajeel replied with a curl of his shoulders. ‘I’m thinkin’ either way, you aren’t gonna wanna find out… So, let go of the girl…” He suggested all the while still smirking, as the kid on the ground began to push himself up slowly, holding onto his jaw, his face covered in mud.

“There’s three of us… And only one yo-” The one on the ground had started to say, but was unable to finish, as his jaw was met with a ruthless kick from Gajeel’s heavy boot. The kid went flying back onto the ground for a second time. Blood leaking from his mouth, as he laid there sprawled out onto the ground.

Finally, the boy holding onto Juvia had dropped her at this point. Both him and his friend now terrified by the ruthless violence of Gajeel’s strike. Juvia was on her knees as the two boys quickly scrambled to pick up their downed friend. They began to both pull him up by either arm, as Gajeel stood there watching. His leg still out in warning, but his smirk was gone and his brow had lowered in malice.

“Leave.” Gajeel stated, his voice no longer playful, only threatening. The two were nodding their heads in unison, as their friend looked on with hazy eyes and blood leaking from his lips. They brought him up to his feet, despite his struggle to stand and then quickly began to drag him away. Gajeel stood there watching them, for as long as he felt was necessary, his fist coming back down. Juvia was also watching them on her hands and knees in disbelief.

Finally, once they were a good distance away, Gajeel turned back towards the girl on the ground, causing Juvia to stiffen up, as he began to step towards her slowly. She glanced up at him, a bit afraid, unsure of what he was about to do. He paused right in front of her, looking down at her. His brow was still hanging low over his eyes, which made him appear angry. Juvia could feel herself beginning to shake, as she braced herself for something. Gajeel then moved again and Juvia could not help, but jump a little, but all he did was reach a hand out towards her as if to help her stand.

“Hey rain girl… I’ve seen you out here for the last few days… And I thought it was time I tell you…” He paused, his stare almost all knowing as it eluded her, to what it could possibly mean. “Whoever it is, that you are waiting for… They’re not comin’ back…"
Juvia sat there, hearing Gajeel’s youthful voice in her mind. She was lost somewhere within the confines of sleep, so cold and unfeeling as she recounted this memory with vivid clarity.

“Juvia!” Came a voice in the distance, but she was unable to discern if it was part of a dream or not.

Gajeel came running forwards as fast, as he could while dealing with his healing leg, leaving splashes in his wake as he made his way through the darkness and rain. There! Came his thoughts as he spotted someone. A still form in the distance, slumped over and residing underneath a large familiar tree. God damn it Juvia! Gajeel cursed internally, his eyes slamming shut for half of a second in fear, as he began to push himself harder. Kicking his feet into a faster pace, despite the pain that plagued him for it.

“Juvia!” He shouted towards her as he gained ground.

“Gajeel! Did you find her?!” Came a voice from behind him, just as he had arrived in front of Juvia, now a heap on the ground. Her body against the tree, her skin a ghostly white. He rested his good hand over her bare shoulder, it was cold to the touch. Which wasn’t surprising, as she was wearing a dress and she was completely soaked. Her eyes were closed and she was still.

“Damn it!” He seethed. “I’m over here Levy!” He called, his voice frustrated, not towards her, but the situation they had found themselves in. “Under the tree, she’s here!” He then brought the hand that was on Juvia’s shoulder up to her cheek, where there was some slight color still signaling a bit of life left in her. “Juvia?!” He hollered into her face, just as the splashes of Levy’s running, could be heard approaching from behind. She finally arrived right beside him, just as he was staring closely into Juvia’s face, to see if she would respond to his touch. “Juvia, do you hear me?! We’re going to get you out of here!”

Juvia could feel the warmth of Gajeel’s hand over her face. Her eye began to twitch, attempting to open, despite the protest of her exhausted, but also numb body.

“Gajeel…” She uttered.

Oh thank god… Gajeel thought, exhaling deeply. Levy was watching him carefully as his posture literally exposed his relief at finding his friend still alive, his chest visibly heaving.

“She doesn’t look so good Gajeel…” Levy stated eyeing Juvia gravely. “We got to get her out of the elements and get her somewhere warm and dry right away…” She spoke up. “What is she even doing out here, like this?” Levy questioned in exasperation, glancing back at him. Gajeel’s eyes found their way to the empty bottle next to Juvia’s weak body.

“That’s a story for another day…” He stated, while staring at it. “For now, lets just get her out of here.”

“Yes.” Levy stated with haste beginning to move quickly, kneeling beside him on the other side of the nearly passed out girl, as he began to take hold of Juvia’s arm.

“Listen Juvia, you’re coming with me.” He began to say to her as they gently lifted her up together. He watched as Juvia’s head began to move, her lips upturning just ever so slightly as her eyes stayed shut.
“Okay…” She mumbled barely audible.

Juvia could see him there in her mind, standing before her in his youthful frame. His hand still open and reaching down towards her, as she kneeled. His gaze still over her, very serious yet somehow full of empathy.

“They’re not comin’ back…” He spoke, his words heavy with the weight of truth. And of all of the understanding, of what that could possibly mean for her. “But… That’s okay…” He continued, doing his best to try and sound reassuring, even though his tone seemed to question it, himself.
“Because… You can come with me…” He offered with finality.

Juvia stared at his outstretched hand for a moment. Her head lowering suddenly as all of the tears came flowing up towards her eyes. He waited there patiently, no words, until she finally looked back up at him. He knew, just as she did, she had no other options at her disposal and so he had offered her a way out. A way out of, loneliness.

Juvia shivered, her eyes closing, but her hand was reaching up towards his as she bowed her head in shame. She took hold of his outstretched hand and he suddenly pulled her up with gusto. The shock of it, causing her eyes to open once again, as she began to wipe away her tears with the hand Gajeel was not holding.

“Sometimes… Ya just gotta do stuff fer yerself…” He spoke, while still holding onto her hand. His touch so much warmer then the cold rain she had been forced to endure for days. She glanced up to him with a look of slight confusion. But I didn’t do this myself… You helped me… She thought.

But all she did was nod instead and Gajeel offered her a tiny smirk in return. One that seemed very befitting to him, yet only reserved for a few.

“Yea see… You’ll make it.”

"Gajeel…” Levy huffed as the two of them made their way through the park, each supporting the limp Juvia on one side. Gajeel on the side of his good shoulder and Levy on his opposite side. “I know you hate when I ask this…” She staggered. Her breath was showing as the rain continued to fall over the two of them. “But- do you want to take her to a hospital?” She paused, to breathe again, a bit of a shiver in her voice. “It might be the best thing you can do for her.” She suggested, causing Gajeel to pause in contemplation.

“No…” He finally managed.

“No…?” Levy questioned him. “Are you sure… Shouldn’t it be okay…? She isn’t you after all…?” Levy questioned and Gajeel shook his head.

“Just trust me on this one shrimp…” He answered, his tone grave as his mind went to Jose and his uncertainty about what had happened. “We just need to get her back to my place… How much further is the car?” He questioned with frustration.

“Not much… It’s parked just beyond that curve.” Levy answered.
“Hear that Juvia…?” Gajeel spoke, to his barely conscious friend. “We’re almost there… It’s right up ahead… We’re takin’ you home…”

“Gajeel…” Juvia began to mutter, causing him to smirk, his eyes still full of worry, but his voice full of hope.

“You see… You’re gonna make it.” He told her brightly as Levy looked on with curious eyes.

Lucy sat upon her bed, the skin around her eyes still puffy as she stared at the object in her lap with longing. It was a small mahogany box, finely made with a gold clasp that was left unlocked. Lucy sniffled to herself as she gently undid the clasp and lifted the lid. The inside was heavily cushioned with a maroon velvet material to keep its presented contents safe. There sitting upon the cushion in the center of the box, were three gold items roughly the size of a pencil, but far more elaborate looking with each one being unique.

The first of the three to the left, resembled that of a highly decorated urn, a symbol for what appeared to be waves, etched across it. The symbol for Aquarius, of the zodiac. The next golden object that was placed in the middle of the box, appeared to be crafted in such a manner, that it resembled a goat head. The symbol for Capricorn, the sea goat of the zodiac strewn across it. And lastly the third item to the right, was designed with the elements of a crab in mind. The symbol for Cancer of the zodiac, etched across the thicker end of it.

Lucy stared at the three objects with comforting familiarity, as though they somehow brought her peace. Each one jagged near the end as they appeared to be very fancy, elaborate looking themed keys.

To what doors they lead to, she hadn’t any idea. She had never known the answer to that question. All she had really known was that they had belonged to her mother and had been in her mother’s family for generations. Passed down from family member to family member and she had always admired them in her youth, so much so, that her mother had given them to her, when she had started to become ill. They were the only thing of her mother’s that she had taken with her, when she had decided to leave her father and her home behind.

Lucy continued to look over them, her chocolate eyes beginning to blur over again as she thought of her father’s words once more.

*What am I supposed to do mom…?* She questioned. *Am I wrong for defying him over and over again, in light of my own dreams? And if I am… Why does it hurt so much?* She began to question this. Her eyes closing, as her teeth came down tightly. Tears dragging a path down her cheeks again. She sat there in her sorrow, her chest hurting all thanks to being heartbroken over the situation with her dad.

Lucy’s eyes were still closed tightly when a small knock made her lift her head and open them back up wide. She glanced up at the window beside her bed and there was the face of Natsu staring back at her, with a small wave and “yo” as he looked at her with curiosity. Just seeing him, instantly made her lips curl up as she reached over to open the window for him. In he crawled, stepping onto her bed as Lucy began to wipe at her tears.

“It wasn’t locked you know…” She offered between sniffles. “You could have just come in.”

“I know, but…” Natsu responded while closing the window behind him. “I didn’t want to surprise
you like last time and get kicked.” He turned to her with a smile. “Didn’t really think you needed the surprise right now anyways.” Lucy glanced down at the box in her hands, still smiling weakly, her eyes still very sad though. She had changed out of her wet clothing into pink sweatpants and a simple white nighttime T-shirt.

“I was expecting you this time…” She answered, looking at the keys once more. Natsu sat beside her, his legs hanging off of the bed as he inched near her. His head leaning in close to hers, to see what she was looking at.

“What you got there?” He then asked, nearly getting in her way to take a peek.

“My mother’s Zodiac Keys.” She answered gently, still smiling despite her teary face. Natsu looked over them with amazed eyes.

“Pretty cool Lucy.” He answered in awe as she nodded.

“They always bring me comfort, when I’m feeling down.” She spoke. “Because they make me feel close to my mom, even though she is gone from this world.” Natsu began to grip at his scarf, the very same that was always around his neck.

“Trust me, I get that.” He answered and Lucy looked to him as he kept his eyes on the keys.

“I know you do.” She answered, still smiling and he then sat up straight, and instinctively began to reach for her. Bringing an arm around her shoulders, while his head moved down to rest over hers, as he smiled gently. Doing his best to be comforting.

“It’s alright…” He began to say, as her smile faded and she allowed herself to cuddle up next to him in her sadness. “I’m sorry Lucy… I’m sorry about your dad. He’s a real ass…” Natsu stated not knowing what more he could offer.

“I guess so…” She laughed bitterly. “But maybe it’s time for me to just give up on all of this and finally do what he wants… It seems like he is never going to leave me alone if I don’t…” She could feel herself fighting off tears. “He said he is actually staying here now, Natsu… In Magnolia, for business reasons, but mostly because I am here as well.” She closed her eyes, as her head was still against him. She could hear his heart. “What am I supposed to do?” She questioned him desperately.

“No way, screw that!” He began to exclaim. Natsu began to push her up, his hands landing on her shoulders, as he looked to her with two serious eyes. Lucy watched him with slight surprise. “You can’t do that Lucy!” He stated, shaking her slightly. “It’s your life, your dreams and he can’t take that away from you. You gotta keep fighting him. Isn’t that what your mother would want you to do?!” Natsu questioned her and Lucy’s eyes glanced down at this in shame.

“Yes…” She answered softly, “But he’s becoming more persistent. He’s making threats… I’m just afraid and… This whole thing… It hurts.” Natsu watched her steadily, his grip on her softening.

“Yea… I’m sure it does…” He answered her somberly. “But I promise I will help you… We won’t let him win… And one day… Maybe your father will see why you had to do what you had to do.” Lucy glanced up at him, her smile slowly returning and her tears returning now out of relief more than anything.

“Thank you Natsu…” She spoke as he smiled at her confidently in return. Just before any other words could be spoken the sound of a phone went off between them on the bed. Natsu’s hands fell away from Lucy’s shoulders as he looked to the object on her bed. Lucy sighed, her breathing a bit shaky, as though she feared it was her father. She picked up the object between them, still holding
onto the box in her lap, securely.

“Oh… it’s only Loke…” She breathed out in clear relief. “Just telling me he had a good time tonight…” She added, looking a bit forlorn as she thought about how wonderful her night had been, before her father had shown up unannounced. Natsu glanced up at her, with the same serious expression over his face.

“Have you told him yet…?” He then questioned. “Ya know, about what you’ve been dealing with, with your dad?” Lucy brought her hand down in hopelessness.

“No…” She sighed. “I didn’t want drag all of my baggage out for him to see… We just started dating…” She answered.

“You care about him though, right?” Natsu then asked, which caused Lucy to blush slightly.

“Well yea… Or at least he’s been pretty good to me so far.” Lucy answered somewhat shyly, though Natsu seemed unfazed.

“Well, if he’s worth anythin’, then he won’t turn you away just because of that, Lucy.” Natsu answered rather bluntly. “You should tell him.” Lucy once again glanced down, her eyes now on the phone in her hand where she could still read the text from Loke, followed by a winking face emoji.

“Maybe…” She spoke while staring at it.

“If you trust him, I’m sure he will support you… And if not…” Natsu’s smile began to grow. “Then I get ta beat ‘im up!” He exclaimed, his eyes closing as his wide smile took up entirety of his face, causing Lucy to giggle in return. Her expression softening as she glanced back down at the box in her lap.

No matter what my relationship is, with my dad… I am lucky… Came Lucy’s thought in response to Natsu’s words. Lucky enough to still have such wonderful people in my life mom… So, for that I can be grateful… She thought as she glanced back up at Natsu’s smiling face.

After a rather hectic drive and two slow elevator rides later, Gajeel and Levy had arrived back at the penthouse. The two of them filing in through the door rather carefully as they hauled in the no longer conscious Juvia over both of their shoulders. Levy was the first one inside, with Gajeel supporting most of Juvia’s weight as they shuffled their way in through the space

“The couch Levy…” Gajeel groaned between gritted teeth, doing his best to ignore all of the strain that this was causing his injured body.

“Right.” Levy answered him, hastily going towards it as the two of them moved together, the door shutting behind them. They made their way across the room, before carefully setting Juvia down on the leather furniture. Once she was settled, Levy began to peel off the large soaked hoodie and cast it aside. Meanwhile Gajeel made his way around the coffee table in front of the couch, leaning down towards it.

“Can you help me move this?” He questioned, putting his only free hand on the table’s edge. Levy was bending over Juvia to examine her, but quickly jumped up to aid him in response.

“Of course!”
“Thanks, it’s hard with one arm.” He muttered, as Levy came up next to him.

Together the two of them dragged the table some distance away from the couch, allowing for more room. Once that was done, they both headed back towards Juvia wordlessly. A certain aura of worry floating between them as the situation was far too grave to converse any further, allowing the silence to linger.

Levy was the first one to approach the couch, sinking down to her knees on the floor right in front of the sleeping woman. Her head hovering somewhere above Juvia’s shoulder, as she examined her for a second time. Gajeel took up residence behind Levy, spectating from above as his eyes clouded with uncertainty about what they should do. He watched as Levy appeared to be studying Juvia, only standing because it was hard for him to bend down. He shifted his gaze away from Levy back up to Juvia, taking in her appearance with concern.

Juvia was ghostly pale, her revealed shoulders and arms shining as though covered in a shimmering film. Her hair also appeared much darker, as it stuck to her cheeks and neck in various places. Her clothing was very much the same, a much too thin fabric for the type of weather they had found her in, clinging to her body tightly due to being soaked.

Gajeel’s muscles were tensing the longer he examined his unconscious friend. Her appearance limp, but almost peaceful as though she were a body placed in a casket for viewing. This deeply disturbed him, as he realized how corpse like she appeared while lying there so still. He was glad to be distracted from this thought, as Levy began to lift up her hand and move it towards Juvia’s face. Gajeel began to tilt his head, transfixed as he watched Levy carry out her soft movements. Her hand slow and so full of care, as she gently cleared Juvia’s face of all of the wet hair, before resting her palm over the sleeping woman’s cheek. She then turned her head, her eyebrows meeting in the middle, as though she were contemplating something with the upmost seriousness. He could feel himself beginning to fidget with worry at the look over her face, until he finally couldn’t resist asking.

“Well…?” His distress was apparent.

“She’s warm in the face.” Levy responded in turn, her hand shifting up to Juvia’s forehead. “She could be coming down with something, after putting her body through that.” She then added while trying to get a read on Juvia’s temperature. She began to turn her head back towards the sleeping woman. “It’s hard to say though.” She continued softly, her eyelids lowered halfway. “We know she might have a lot of alcohol in her system.”

Gajeel continued to observe, as Levy’s hand removed itself from Juvia’s face, only to move down to her wrist. Again, he found himself unable to look away, as Levy gingerly picked up Juvia’s hand and rested her own fingers against it.

“All of that… Does a number on your immune system. Especially if you are already under stress.” Levy continued. All the while she was gently lacing her fingers through Juvia’s limp ones. She then rested her other hand over Juvia’s knuckles, locking Juvia’s hand between her own. “Her hands are so cold…” Her voice was full of pity as she said this. She then brought her face down, to blow a warm breath over Juvia’s fingers, before rubbing them lightly with her own hands. Her head lifted and turned slightly, before speaking again. Gajeel stood in wait, his body completely still as he became cornered in Levy’s peripheral vision. “We need to get her some blankets and dry clothes, Gajeel.” She then commanded somberly.
“Uh… Yea, okay… I’m on it…!” He answered with a bit of an awkward tremble to his voice, before walking away hastily. Levy shifted her gaze to watch him go, his movements were stiff and his steps staggered. Her expression softened in response, sympathy clear as day on her face.

_Poor guy… He doesn’t care how much pain he is in._ She thought looking back towards Juvia’s face, while still clasping the sleeping woman’s hand. _He is that worried about you. He’ll just keep going no matter what… I never realized-_ Levy’s thought was interrupted, as she could hear Gajeel stumbling up the steps. This made her choose to stand up, finally letting go of Juvia’s hand as she shook her head with straight lips. _I wish he would have just asked me to go up the stairs for him…_ She thought with a sigh.

She then began to change her line of thinking to be more helpful. _Okay… So… He probably went up there, to grab her some clothes. So… What can I do while he’s doing that…?_ Levy’s head swiveled around the room, until she spotted the hallway off to the right. Seeing it caused her to recall where she could remember seeing blankets and towels.

 Meanwhile Gajeel was upstairs, making his way into the master bedroom as quickly as he could. He then began to scramble through his dresser for any kind of acceptable clothing.

“Somethin’ warm, somethin’ warm… Come on…” He was muttering to himself. Unfortunately, he had never really been much of a sweater guy, so he ended up settling for one of his black cotton T-shirts, that had shrunk in the wash. Then after a little more searching, he had managed to find a pair of fleece pajama pants, that he hadn’t worn in ages. Once he grabbed them both, he was back down the stairs as fast as his leg would allow him to be. When he came back to face the couch, he immediately had to stop and turn his head away, his hand shielding the view.

“Hey! Hold on! What the hell are ya doin’?!” Gajeel suddenly asked, his face becoming red as Levy was in the process of basically undressing Juvia and was nearly done.

“What the hell does it look like I’m doing? I’m getting these wet clothes off of her! I don’t really have a choice! If it bothers you so much then go stand over there for a minute!” Levy snapped, shooting him a glare as she pointed elsewhere.

“Uh yea… I think I’ll do that.” He spoke awkwardly, his body beginning to move away.

“Not before you give me those clothes you won’t!“ Levy then suddenly demanded and Gajeel let out an audible noise of frustration, as he turned back around. His feet shuffling far closer to the couch than he was comfortable being, with his nearly naked friend on it. Thankfully Levy had a towel over her at least, keeping her partially covered as she had attempted to dry her off some. Levy’s hand was coming out to reach towards Gajeel, but she refused to leave her spot near the couch.

“Well come on! Hurry up!” She then demanded again, as Gajeel was reluctantly dragging his feet towards her, with his head still turned away.

“I’m comin’ alright?! Don’t rush me!” He complained and Levy could only shake her head and roll her eyes, as Gajeel finally pushed the clothes into her hand, before high tailing it out of there, rather abruptly.

“It’s a medical emergency, I’m pretty sure she will forgive you this time around…” She then stated with annoyance at Gajeel’s retreating form. Her hands beginning to move in order to dress the passed out Juvia as quickly as she could alone. Gajeel stood about fifteen feet away, his back turned towards
“Yea well… That doesn’t make it any less weird fer me…” He answered. “I’ve known that girl fer years…” Gajeel explained. “She’s basically like my…” There was a pause as though he didn’t wish to say what he was going to.

“Sister…?” Levy finished for him, receiving another brief pause in return. Levy glanced up at Gajeel’s back as he straitened up, her one eyebrow lifting. He cleared his throat, but said nothing. After a short while, it was Levy’s turn to clear her throat. “I’m done by the way… So, it’s safe for you to turn around now…” She spoke up and Gajeel turned back towards the couch wordlessly, his vision aimed towards the ground.

Levy was now wrapping Juvia up in the blankets she had grabbed from Gajeel’s laundry room, as Gajeel slowly stepped back up towards the couch. He watched Levy work with great care, standing over the back of the couch, as she kneeled back down in front of it. She then glanced up at him, still burying the sleeping woman in blanket after blanket.

“Think we’re going to want to get her an appropriate pillow… Some water and maybe… A waste basket.” She spoke softly. “In case she wakes up feeling sick.” Gajeel locked eyes with her, his gaze half lidded as he nodded.

“I’ll get that stuff…” He answered, his voice had quieted, but Levy stood up in response. She was now holding onto Juvia’s soaked clothing.

“Are the pillows upstairs..?” She then asked and Gajeel nodded in response. “Then I will get those…” She then bent down and picked up the wet hoodie she had discarded earlier as well. “You take these to the laundry room and grab the waste bin in there and some water for her… Okay?” Her voice was almost motherly as she offered Gajeel the wet clothing from her hands. Gajeel turned his head away from Levy as he took the wet item from her.

“Yer the boss…” He answered simply, as Levy began to move around the couch and head towards the stairs. She took a few steps away, before coming to a halt and then turning back on her heel to face him.

“Oh also…” She then began, pointing to him. “Do you want me to help you, take that off?” She then asked with narrowed eyes, referring to his jacket. Gajeel glanced down at himself, basically showing that he had forgotten all about his own wet coat. Levy came over to him before he could really answer. “Here…” She spoke, reaching for the sleeve, her fingers taking hold of the leather.

Gajeel was looking down at her, as she began to help him remove his jacket. Saying nothing more as he watched her take his coat in the direction of the closet, hanging it up before heading back towards the stairs. It wasn’t until Levy was gone from sight completely, that Gajeel turned his gaze back down towards Juvia, who was now bundled up quite ridiculously as though she were in a cocoon. He could see her eyebrows moving a bit, her cheeks noticeably redder already.

“What would we do without her… huh?” He then asked his passed-out friend quietly, before moving his head back up. “Yea… I don’t know either…” Came his last words, before making his way towards the laundry room.

After a few minutes Gajeel had returned, resting a small waste basket next to the couch, just as Levy had instructed. He then headed towards the fridge and grabbed a bottle of water, before heading back over to the couch where Levy was now gently lifting Juvia’s head to place a pillow down
underneath her. Gajeel stepped around the couch, setting the bottle down onto the coffee table as he passed it on by.

Levy was standing back up to her full height, just as he approached from behind. He stood only mere inches away from her, but with no contact between them. He noticed her gazing down at Juvia, just as she had been before. He too moved his line of vision to Juvia, the two of them studying the resting woman before them, with renewed hope. The air had quieted down again, the sound of light rain was still coming from outside.

“What do you think…?” Gajeel finally questioned Levy, as they both continued to look over Juvia. Levy took a moment, her eyes scanning over the unconscious girl one last time in contemplation.

“I think…” She began in uncertainty, unsure if she should really say in case she was wrong. “I think she will be okay…” She then finished definitively, her eyes never leaving the sleeping girl’s face.

Gajeel could feel the one side of his lips automatically curling up at Levy’s response. His non-sling arm lifting slightly. His head bowing forwards some, so that his mouth was hovering above Levy’s shoulder, near her ear.

“That’s what I like to hear…” He growled lowly, Levy’s eyes widened as she whipped her head up, but there wasn’t time. His arm was already snaking around her midsection before she could be ready for it, his movements fast and surprising. “Listen to you…” He whispered, his mouth coming closer to her neck and ear. “So confident now…”

Levy’s head tilted to the side, away from his mouth upon instinct. Her one eye closing as her hands jumped up to grab hold of the forearm he had wrapped around her. Gajeel could feel the tension in her fingers, all thanks to the suspense of his actions.

“Gajeel…?” She uttered out in a rattled voice, as she felt him gently press his lips over her neck, her hair standing on end as a result. His head was moving into the crook of her neck even further, his nose grazing her skin, as he held her in a tighter embrace, as close as he could manage with his sling still being in the way. His eyes were now closed, as he continued to speak.

“Thank you…” Came his muffled voice and she shivered. His warm breath spreading over her neck and collarbone each time he spoke. “She’s going to be okay… And it’s all thanks to you…” His words were so heartfelt and full of relief, that Levy’s eyelids lowered at hearing them. Her heart was beating fast, and her cheeks were flushing up as Gajeel held onto her tightly.

“I didn’t… Do… Anything…” Her voice stuttered back, still clearly caught off guard as Gajeel’s arm began to massage her up and down slightly in response. It was the only way he could further his embrace over her. He kissed her shoulder.

“Yes, you did…” He then answered, his voice still muffled as he took in her scent. “You did everything… And I am so… Grateful…” The sincerity of his words, were warming Levy up from the inside, even further than his touch. So much so, that she began to just act, bringing a hand up from Gajeel’s arm to reach for his face.

Gajeel could feel her shifting in his grasp and responded by lifting his head off of her neck, his face hovering near her forehead. Levy’s hand was now, resting over his cheek. Her half-lidded eyes matching his, before her gaze lowered down to his lips. She guided his mouth towards her, her head tilting up to meet him in return. The two of them matching lips in such a way that they began to melt into each other, just as they had during their first kiss on the subway, but this time Levy would not be pulling away.
Instead she was turning herself better to face him, allowing for their kiss to deepen. Gajeel’s arm was now moving away from her body, so he could settle a palm over her cheek in an effort to steady her. Levy’s hands meanwhile, had moved down to his waist, their kiss having become a bit more rapid and desperate, before it finally came to an end. Leaving the two of them staring at one another as they both panted for air, their grip on each other still secured.

Gajeel could feel himself swallowing as he continued to meet that look in Levy’s eye. He could see it, she was visibly roused, just as he was from their kiss. He brought his head down, his forehead resting over hers, his hand going down to her shoulder. Both of their mouths were still open as they took in the air.

“Levy…” Gajeel began to breathe out.

“No, don’t say anything else Gajeel…” Levy interjected quickly, her mouth pushing over his once more. Her kiss was far more aggressive this time, but it didn’t last as long. Instead she was pushing away from him some, not seconds later, her voice breathless. “I just want to be with you again…” She admitted to him, far too worked up to be worried or prideful about it. She reached back over to him, bringing her head back up to reach his, “It’s been on my mind ever since that night…” Her gaze lowered off of him for a fraction of a second, before bouncing back up to meet his eyes again, her breath invading his senses.

Gajeel was completely transfixed; their lips meeting once more as a result, both of them having leaned back into each other. Their kiss slower, as Levy’s hands held a tight grip over the fabric of Gajeel’s shirt, as though she needed to hang onto him for balance when trying to reach his mouth. This time when they pulled apart, the distance between them did not increase, but it was Gajeel’s turn to speak.

“Levy…” He spoke out in a breath, “I think you’re amazing…” He managed to get out, she kept her lust filled stare over his, as he continued. “I…” He stuttered out, his head shaking. His emotions were suddenly getting the best of him, reducing him to a bundle of nerves as he glanced down, in doubt. A certain underlining fear fueling him as his eyes widened.

But what if she doesn’t… Gajeel shifted his gaze back up to Levy

God damn it…! His brain suddenly cursed. Say it… He swallowed, his mind continuing its onslaught. Just say what you wanna say…! His mouth opened, but nothing was spoken. Tell her! His mind was now screaming. He closed his eyes in frustration, letting out a nearly seething breath… Tell her you love her… You fucking coward…

Levy did not appear apprehensive, if anything she seemed intrigued. Her head tilting in curiosity at Gajeel’s clear hesitation to speak. He opened his eyes again, looking regrettable.

“Gajeel…” She addressed him softly. “You’re nervous…” It wasn’t a question, it was more like she was stating an observation. And he did not know what to say in response, he glanced down again.

“Very…” He finally answered her truthfully, choosing to be honest above all else as he always had been with her. Levy took him in remorsefully, before lightly pressing her lips to his once more. It was a soft kiss, only meant to bring him comfort, much the opposite of the last several that had transpired between them. Once she pulled away, Gajeel moved his head back slightly to look at her properly. His hand settling over her cheek to cradle her face like before. His lips were beginning to
curl up as he looked over her, with an almost somber expression.

*I'm hopeless, I know it... I can't...* Came his thoughts as his eyes searched over hers. Levy must have noticed the sad way he was looking at her, because her hand came up over his.

“What is it...?” She then asked him with concern in her voice. “What’s wrong?” Gajeel laughed softly and shook his head.

“Nothing...” He answered with a smile, “I just... I want to be with you again too...” He clarified and with that, he could see Levy’s gaze drawing down to his mouth once again. Her eyelids lowering, as she began to lean in. He responded in turn, his eyes closing as their lips made contact once more.

*This is for the best...* He couldn’t help, but think as Levy’s hand tightened over his, her kiss deepening. They pulled away to breathe for a moment. The hand Gajeel had over her face was pushing back through her hair, as Levy bought her arm around his neck. Gajeel was pushing his face past her cheek, down into her neck again and kissing near the corner of her jaw, before allowing his teeth to bite into her, just a little, not very hard.

Her head arched back in response, as Gajeel’s hand continued to cradle her from the back of it, his fingers through her hair. Her eyelids were halfway open, her line of sight angled above Gajeel’s shoulder, towards the ceiling when she heard movement and began to push him away lightly in surprise.

"Gajeel...” She hissed, as he lifted himself off of her and he immediately turned his head, his hand still over her. They both instantly had their eyes on the couch, as Juvia had begun to turn around for the first time since being wrapped up in the blankets. The two of them turning into statues out of apprehension, as they both waited to see if she was now waking up to catch them.

Juvia however did not, all she did was moan, turn around and throw an arm out of her blanket cocoon to let it hang over the edge of the couch. The two of them stared at her for a few seconds longer once her movement had ceased, before finally turning back towards each other in relief.

“Guess that proves it...” Gajeel began after sighing with relief. His tone was quiet as his hands dropped off of Levy, and he smirked at her. “You were right, she’s gonna be fine.” He added proudly. Levy returned his smile, her expression showing gratitude.

“Hopefully... It seems like it...” She answered, her hands were still on Gajeel’s waist and she glanced down, her cheeks showing their color once more. “But maybe... Uh.” She hesitated, something like embarrassment coming over her, as she glanced back up to him with a soft smile and apologetic eyes. “Maybe we shouldn’t be doing this right now...” Gajeel shifted his gaze away from her face at that and Levy felt the need to continue, “It’s not that I don’t want to or anything-It’s just you’re still hurt and-”

Gajeel cut her off, kissing her lightly through a smile. He pulled away, a lopsided smirk still on his face.

“No need to worry yerself over it, shrimp.” He answered, causing Levy’s mouth to hang open. “I get what yer sayin’... And not only that, but you already told me how you feel... Ya know...? The part about wanting this all to happen again and stuff...?” He was smirking like a devil, as he said this and Levy could only stand there. Her eyebrow was lifting as she smiled slightly, despite herself. “You can bet, I won’t be forgettin’ that...” He added lowly, before turning his head towards Juvia. “And Besides...” He continued, his tone changing. “It works out, because I wanna look after the rain woman tonight... Just in case...” He added, his expression becoming more serious. Levy followed
his gaze to Juvia.

“Yea…” She answered softly, her expression looking worried for the woman once more. “I understand that…” She looked back to Gajeel, who still had his gaze over Juvia. “That’s why it’s best if I go for tonight.” Gajeel’s head snapped back in Levy’s direction after hearing her say that.

“Go…? As in leave?” He repeated dumbfounded. “Not now Levy, it’s the middle of the night… I’m not gonna have you goin’ home like this… It’s raining, it’s dark… No way, fuck that!” He said, but Levy was doing her best to interject.

“It’s fine Gajeel…” She answered. “I can take a cab, it’s no big deal…”

“Hell yea it is! Come on… You don’t need to do that… You can stay here until mornin’ at least…” He argued, though his voice was not mean, if anything it was laced with concern, but Levy only shook her head.

“I can’t do that Gajeel… Not with Juvia here…” She reached out a hand in the direction of the sleeping woman. “You need to be able to talk to her about what happened when she wakes up, in privacy… And she doesn’t need to know I was here…” Levy could see the expression on Gajeel’s face beginning to change to one of realization, as he seemed to grasp what she was saying. “Do you understand…? I don’t want to be to a bother… Or be in the way if she needs you… And that way, she doesn’t need to know about me being here either… Not unless you want her too.” Gajeel’s gaze fell away from Levy.

“No…” She doesn’t need to know. The less people who do, the better…” He answered, his voice drifting off and Levy folder her arms.

“Well then, you see… It’s decided…. I’ll call a cab home…”

“No, I can at least give you a ride in the car.” But Levy was only shaking her head once again, as she glared at him.

“No Gajeel! I don’t want to watch you try and drive in that thing again…!” She countered in pure defiance, referring to his sling as she pointed to it. “And besides… You need to stay here and be around, just in case she does wake up… Remember? You said so yourself… You want to look after her… So, just admit it… You don’t want to leave her here alone anyways…” Levy continued, looking at him with the upmost serious expression over her face. “And I don’t want to be the reason you do that.”

Levy had finished speaking, but Gajeel could only stare at her in bewilderment. His mind at a crossroads, stuck somewhere between frustration or amazement towards her. Her doing all of this, just to help him and Juvia, a woman she barely knew. Everything she had done for him thus far on this night, without even considering the other few times she had literally saved him… Gajeel truly did not know where he would have been, if Levy hadn’t been there to help him this time. Which spoke volumes about his level of trust for her, because Gajeel rarely ever relied on anyone for anything. He sat there with these thoughts swirling around in his mind, all the while still staring at her dumbfounded for such a long period of time, that Levy had grown impatient with him.

“What?! Why are you looking at me like that?!” She finally snapped. Gajeel turned his head to the side, his eyes closing as he began to smile like he might laugh. “What Gajeel?!” Levy then asked him again. “Are you about to laugh at me?! I’m being serious!” She replied, hitting him lightly in his good arm as he began to laugh. “What’s so funny?!” She questioned in outrage.

“Gi hi!” He turned back towards her, his eyes opening. “Fine have it yer way shrimp… You
outsmarted me with all yer point proving, as usual.” He grinned down at her, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. “I’ll call em…” He spoke, as Levy watched him and she rolled her eyes turning away.

“That’s why you’re laughing…? Really?” She questioned him while shaking her head. “I swear I don’t get you at all…”

After a few minutes Gajeel had managed to reach a cab service to come pick Levy up and take her home. Levy was leaning against one of the arms of the chair, her eyes on Juvia as Gajeel stepped back towards her, with her now dry coat in hand.

“Shouldn’t be long…” He spoke handing Levy the coat, as she stood back up straight moving off of the chair.

“You need to sit down Gajeel…” She told him as he meandered towards her.

“Eh… I’m fine…” He responded and Levy’s eyebrows lowered. She reached towards his good arm and took hold of it with both hands, dragging him towards her.

“Would you please just humor me… For like a minute.” She exhaled as she brought him in front of the chair and then proceeded to push him very lightly, enough that he got the message.

“Well when you put it that way…” He answered allowing his body to fall into the seat of the chair. Levy leaned her back up against the arm of the chair, beside him. Her arms folding around her coat, as Gajeel hunched his body forwards in the chair, his elbow resting over his knee. They both were watching Juvia wordlessly for a moment, before Gajeel sighed, drawing Levy’s attention back towards him, as she turned her head. He was rubbing his forehead in mild distress, his fingers dragging over the studs of his left brow.

“I just don’t understand…” He began. “I don’t understand why she did this…” Levy was quiet, her head turning back, so that her gaze could fall over Juvia once again. She pondered the question for a moment, her eyelids lowering part ways. “Somethin’ must have happened… Fer her ta be saying that weird stuff on the phone… And for her to be drinkin’ like that… She rarely ever drinks…” Gajeel continued, his words merely the musings of a worried man. He shook his head, “She was actin’ like…” He paused, hips lips stretching into a thin line, as though he wished to frown more, but refused to do it. Levy turned her eyes back over to him as he stayed quiet.

“Gajeel…” She spoke his name gently, his eyes shifted over to meet hers. “It will be okay… You will help her… I know you will…” She reassured him, her voice kind. She then leaned her head towards him. Her hand settling over the side of his face, as she kissed the top of his head. She then pulled away to speak again, “But… For now… I need to go…” Gajeel watched her, his lips upturning in a bitter half smile.

“I know shrimp… It's alright…” He answered. Levy was standing up straight, a small smile over her face, but her eyes had a melancholy appearance to them.

“Please take care of yourself…” She said, before beginning to turn towards the door. That was until Gajeel’s hand came out grabbing hold of her elbow and stopping her in place.

“Hold on…” Gajeel stated. Levy was watching him with curious eyes as he let her go and reached his hand down into the pocket of his pants. Something that was a bit hard for him to do while sitting, so it took a moment. Finally, he managed to get the plastic card out of his pants along with a key. He
offered them both to her as she stared at him, a bit surprised. “So… I don’t really got a phone… As you know…” Gajeel began as Levy continued to stare at the plastic card and key in his hand. “Well I do… But…” His one eye squinted as his head tilted, “You can’t just call me on it…” He explained, his head turning back. “So instead… This is what I’m goin’ ta give you shrimp…” He dropped the two items into her hand. Levy could only stare at them in contemplation, as she continued to listen to him. “This way, you’ll be able to get into my place…” He added, his hand going up to the back of his neck. “And yea… I know… It’s not really the best way to do this whole thing… But… It’s probably the safest way, or at least it was all I could come up with so… That’s why…” He drifted off, before interjecting. “Yer welcomed to come here whenever you want. Even if I’m not here, but don’t feel obligated to either ya know… Fer the most part I can manage pretty good on my own, so… But if you are here, then ya don’t need ta worry, cause like I told you before, nobody ever comes here, but me…” Gajeel’s voice was drifting off again, as he seemed to have his doubts once more, but Levy was leaning towards him. The nearness of her face surprising him, as he had been looking down. He glanced up, upon feeling the contact of her hand on the side of his jaw. She pressed her lips to his gently, pulling away before the redness could reach his ears. She was smiling at him, her eyes warm and her face beautiful, he found himself tongue tied upon looking at her. “Thank you Gajeel.” She responded at last, her voice sweet and full of something sincere, it made his heart pound. “I promise I will be careful… But you have to be too, while I’m gone.” Gajeel sat there as she stared at him, awaiting his response. Finally, he nodded, his throat too dry to form words, and her smile only grew in response. “Okay… It’s time I go for now.” She answered, turning again for the second time, Gajeel began to stand up as Levy started to make her way towards the door. “You didn’t have to get up…” She commented, noticing the stiffness in his movements once more. “Levy…” He started to say following behind her, towards the door. She reached down to pick up her bag as they approached the entryway. “Didn’t I just tell you to take it easy…” She teased, turning back towards him as they stood at the door. Gajeel could only stare at her, his expression far more serious as Levy smiled at him playfully in return. They were quiet for a moment as they stood there and Levy could see that Gajeel had wanted to say something, but he seemed unwilling to once again, just like before. She angled her head slightly, her expression soft and her lips still upturned as she looked him over. He was watching her like the hungry wolf once more, wanting to kiss her again, just as he had before when he had been holding her, his stare intense yet maddening. Levy’s heart was beating fast in response to it, but she was able keep her cool outwardly. Simply playing it off as though she had simply been flirting with him, with no consequence to come of it. “No goodbye’s this time.” She finally spoke. “Doesn’t seem that way to me.” He answered, leaning in slightly, coming in closer, but still keeping about a foot’s worth of distance between them. Levy held her ground, her weight shifting, from one foot to the other, her arms still wrapped up in her coat. She shook her head. “It’s not a goodbye. It’s a ‘see you later.’” She answered, taking a small step towards him. Gajeel was also beginning to smirk as he leaned down towards her, his hand going to the back of her neck and head. “Yea that sounds a lot better…” He said softly, before his lips reached hers. Their kiss tender, but only lasting a few seconds, before they pulled apart. Levy was smiling serenely, before turning towards the door to open it. Gajeel putting himself in the way of it, so it wouldn’t shut as she walked
out into the hall. She took a few steps out, hesitating to turn around and look at him once more.

“See you later, Gajeel…”

“See you later shrimp…” Gajeel answered, as Levy’s lips upturned once again, before she turned away, making her way towards the elevator.

Gajeel closed the door behind him, exhaling deeply, his chest moving with the release. He slowly made his way back towards the living room, his eyes over the couch and the sleeping woman on top of it. He approached from the back of the furniture, his hand resting on it. He looked down towards Juvia’s face.

“Looks like yer not the only one in trouble here Rain Woman…” He commented while staring at her. “Now hurry up and wake up… So I can know what the hell happened…” He added worriedly all while keeping his gaze glued to her peaceful face.

Levy was on her way out, after having reached the lobby of Gajeel’s apartment building. It was a very fancy area with shining marble floors and a large front desk with two doormen manning it. It was also decked out with an array of sculptures in the waiting area, and a decorative white ceiling with more chandeliers hanging down from it.

Levy did her best to ignore how out of place she felt while walking through the room. Her mind still on Gajeel and everything that had just transpired between them. She had her hand over the pocket of her jeans where she could feel the key and security card still safely, snugged away inside.

She had put on her coat inside of the elevator, drawing up her hood up as it had been when she had arrived in the parking garage hours before, to meet with Gajeel. She passed on by the two men at the desk, as naturally as she could. Her eyes downcast as she made her way, her face still warm as she came upon the revolving door that led to outside. She pushed her way out arriving back into the rain, underneath the night sky. She glanced up towards the sky, as she made her way down the steps towards the sidewalk.

The clouds were still in place, but there seemed to be signs of a clearing to come. The rain had calmed considerably. Levy brought the hood down as she continued to look up, her body was tense, her heart practically leaping inside of her chest out of excitement. She smiled to herself as her head came back down, the cab appearing in her sights across the street. Her movements were quick, as she nearly skipped across the empty street towards the vehicle. She couldn’t even suppress the grin over her face upon entering the cab and telling him where to go.

He nodded and they were on their way, as Levy sat there alone in the backseat, practically lightheaded as she thought about everything. Her eyes stayed on her bag, she had, had it settled in her lap.

So Gajeel does have somebody in his life after all… She was still smiling as she thought about how worried he had been over Juvia. It wasn’t as though Levy hadn’t believed Juvia that day she had told Levy that her and Gajeel were close friends, but truly seeing it, verses only hearing about their friendship was entirely different.
It was somehow more relieving, especially after realizing how little contact Gajeel did have with people in his personal life. It had almost seemed as though he had nobody to depend on in his life. He doesn’t even really have a personal life from the sounds of it… Levy couldn’t help, but think to herself sadly.

Levy glanced up towards the window, realizing they were nearly to her apartment already as she didn’t live very far from where Gajeel lived, she normally walked home after all. Well maybe now… She thought, her eyelids lowering as she smiled softly to herself. Her hand reaching up towards her chest. I could be someone, he can depend on… She wondered to herself inwardly, the thought causing her to nearly sigh as her chest hurt and her stomach clenched with nervous excitement. She leaned her head back, her eyes going up to the roof of the car, before closing, her smile was still intact as Gajeel’s face came to her mind.

Morning had arrived and with it the rain had finally died for good, leaving the ground a soupy mess of mud and saturated grass, as the sky blended into tints of lavender. Mirajane was making her way across campus, a black winter coat with a fluffy hood dawned over her shoulders and a closed umbrella in one hand and a tote bag in the other. She hummed to herself as she made her way towards the center quad, approaching the main office building. Pulling out her keys as she came upon the glass double doors, before unlocking them.

She glanced around once inside, turning towards a console mounted to the wall to enter a password and keep the building’s alarm from setting off. Once done, she hit the light switches up and then made her way towards the elevator that led to Makarov’s office floor.

It was Saturday morning, so not many were expected to be on campus, with the exception of students who lived on site and a few staff workers. Maybe a few more people who would be showing up to use the labs, or go to the library, but aside from that, the weekends were normally pretty quiet at the collage. It was for this reason that Mira and the headmaster would often come into the office to catch up on some paperwork for a few uninterrupted hours.

Today was more of the same as Mira was normally the first to arrive, having always been such an early riser. Her lips were curved up into an easygoing smile as she waited for the elevator to come to a halt. Once the doors opened, she began to make her way down the hall towards Makarov’s office door, the bottom of her dress swaying with her movements. She was back to her humming once again, her mind on the routine ahead. Which also meant that she didn’t take notice to the one large door being left slightly ajar as she brought her hand up to it gently.

She stepped inside of the office, immediately turning to push the door part ways closed behind her. She then set the umbrella down into an awaiting basket and placed her bag down beside her. She began to take off her coat, her body turning with the movement as she let it slide down from her shoulders, that was until something very strange caught her eye.

Mira ceased all movement, straining her eyes across the room towards Makarov’s desk. The space was mildly dark, as she hadn’t bothered to turn on the lights yet. The drawn curtains over the large windows only allowing for the light of outside to filter in, like a glare around the spot where she was trying to stare. She paused for only few seconds her brain trying to understand what it was, that she was looking at, before her eyes widen in terror.

Mirajane’s jaw dropped, her complexion instantly paling as she twisted her body around fast, no longer bothering to remove her open coat. Her hand was whipping to the side, slapping the light-switch on the wall beside her to illuminate the room. She then spun back around only to fall back
against the open door, shuddering once she got a true eyeful of what she had actually been seeing. A short-lived shriek escaping her throat, before she collapsed to her hands and knees in the hall. Her sights now on the plush rug beneath her, as her hand clasped over her own mouth tightly. Her eyes were now wide ovals, as she fought off the urge to be sick in all of her mounting shock and hysteria.

There planted in the middle of Makarov’s desk was none other than the slack jawed head of Banaboster Goodrich. His eyes opened and staring lifelessly in the direction of the office door where Mira had walked in. Blood surrounding the base of what was left of his neck.

Chapter End Notes

Some are reaching, few are there  
Want to reign from a hero's chair  
Some are scared to fly so high

Well this is how we have to try  
Have no envy and no fear  
Have no envy and no fear

Brother, brother we all see  
You're hiding out so painfully  
See yourself, come out to play

A lover's rain will wash away  
Your envy and your fear  
So have no envy and no fear

When your sister turns to leave  
Only when she's most in need  
Take away the cause of pain

By showing her we're all the same  
Have no envy and no fear  
Have no envy and no fear
Every day we try to find
Search our hearts and our minds
The place we used to call our home

Can't be found when we're alone
So have no envy, no fear
Have no envy and no fear

“No Envy, No Fear” By Joshua Radin

End Notes

This story was inspired by the lady Ga Ga song Monster.

This is only chapter 1, the following chapters will only get longer in length from here. Consider this a bit of a warning, because some are going to be super long. This story is currently 16 chapters long, with the 17th chapter started and the total length being over 268,913 words long.

I started writing it in the Summer of 2014. Since then, it has been edited numerous times with my progress having been greatly slowed down by several major life changing events that have happened to me personally. The up and down, and uncertain condition of of my father, before his untimely and traumatizing death being among the center of them. That event greatly slowed my progress in the year of 2017, but here I am writing and posting again... And now... I'm sharing this story here, on this site too.

Once it gets caught up, I hope to stay on task by posting a chapter at least once a month (I hope). My writing is slow and tedious, because I am very picky. I enjoy it a lot, but I take my writing very seriously and I struggle to put out my best work and so, that is why it may take some time.

Anyways if anyone reads these... Thank you for checking out Monster and I hope you enjoy it. I don't mind hearing feedback. I just ask that you please be constructive when criticizing, so I know how to improve. Thank you again for reading and have a good day.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!